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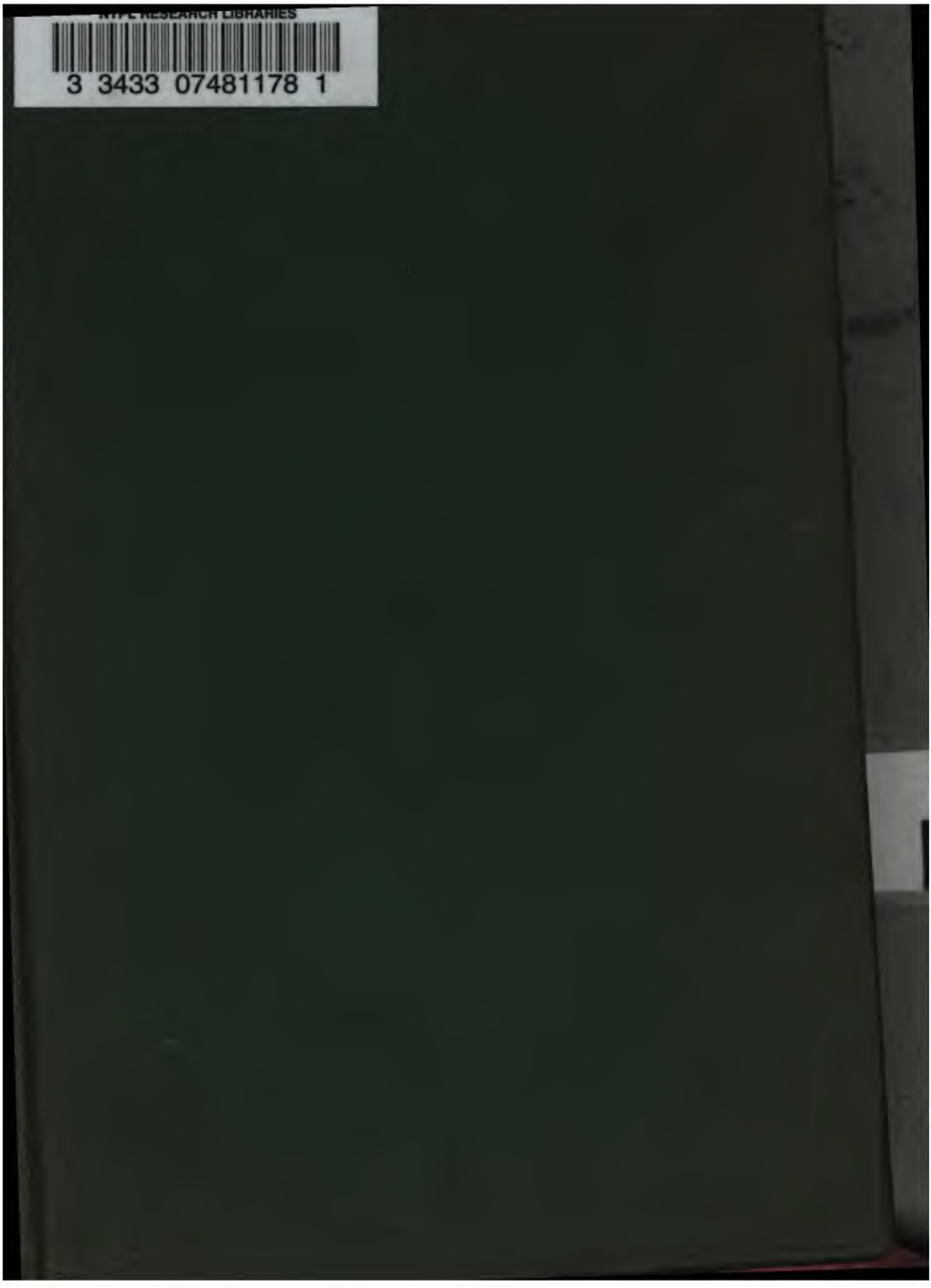
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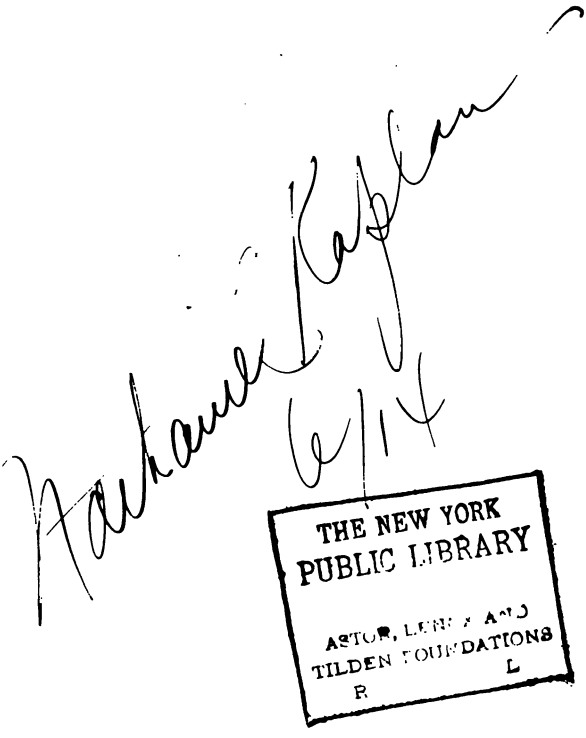
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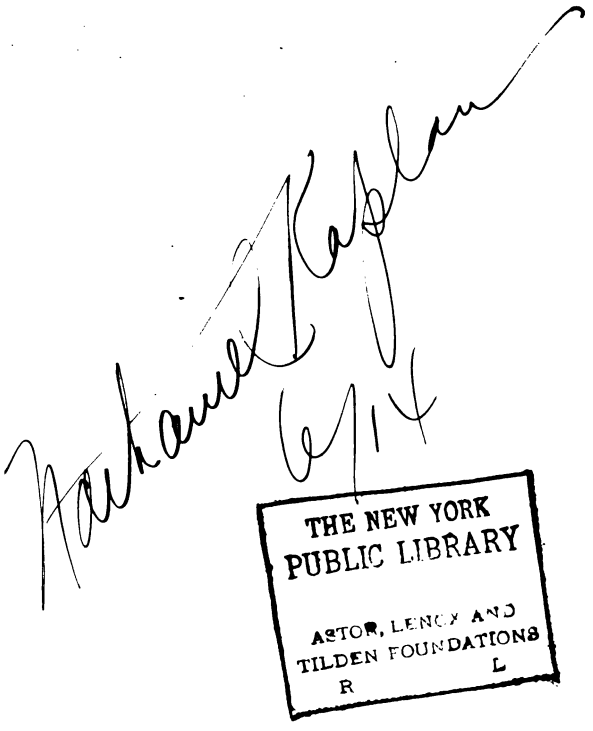

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"You're a pretty, cold, heartless child, and that's what you're cut out *for, I guess—not for* love and marriage and the big things."

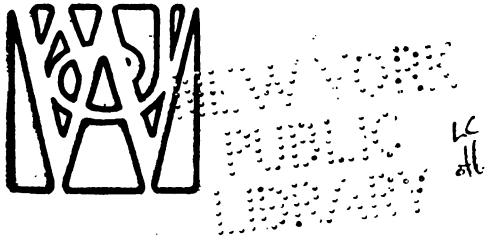
THE
EAGLE'S MATE

BY

ANNA ALICE CHAPIN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

DOUGLAS DUER



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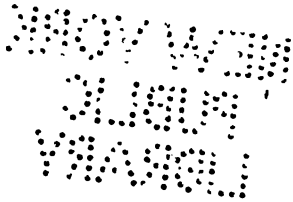

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THE EAGLE'S MATE.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. BRECKENRIDGE.

"Cousin Sally, do you put the spices first, or the salt?"

"The salt, of course, child! Don't you know how to make *pot-pourri* yet? And be sure that the rose-leaves are as dry as dry."

Silence again, broken only by the humming of many bees above Mrs. Breckenridge's rose garden, and the sharp whirring of grasshoppers out on the sunny lawn. In a little while another low note was added to the bees' song: Anemone had begun to croon one of her queer little airs, wordless, almost tuneless, just a lazy, well-satisfied mood made audible. So does a kitten purr in a warm corner. Anemone was eighteen, and had never thought consciously, nor felt painfully, in her whole life.

Mrs. Breckenridge sat on the veranda and sewed with regular dainty gestures. She was a curious-looking woman, large and spare of frame, with a certain haggard eager air at variance with her precise clothes and prim movements. She seemed to be eternally playing some sort of part, and consciously suppressing some quality that was abiding and insistent. Her lace collar and old-fashioned cameo brooch gave a vague and incongruous impression of being only a costume donned for the occasion; her hands, large and nervous, would have been more suitably employed in anything but sewing. She had blue eyes, rather strained and watchful, but when they blazed up vividly, she nearly always remembered to hide them quickly with dropped lids. Her red-brown hair, roughly streaked with gray, was parted neatly in the middle, but the wiry, coarse strands seemed to tug at the tight side-combs, and plainly tried to fly loose about her face. For the rest, Mrs. Breckenridge was about fifty-five, and bore every hall-mark of health and prosperity.

Anemone Breckenridge was her dead husband's niece. The fact that she was not related to the woman on the veranda was as patent as nature could make it. The girl was small and slight and delicately made, with a little, pale, pretty face under a cloud of dead-black hair, and huge gray eyes put in with that dirty finger which gives the final touch of beauty. There was Celtic blood in Anemone,—probably of the Breton strain, for she was a shade

too fine and nervous in type to be kin to Ireland. As she sat among the wooden trays heaped with dried rose-leaves, and filled the crockery *pot-pourri* jars with concentrated fragrance, she made a singularly lovely picture, full of young poetry, of soft yet poignant suggestions of romance. In many young girls one can discern, as from afar, the bountiful plenitude of maturity. One can imagine them with children in their arms, with graying hair, with sweet mother-eyes and deeper bosoms. But Anemone seemed to go veiled in glamour. She impressed the beholder as being typically and immortally young and exquisite,—as deathless and as ageless as Enid or Nicolette.

The little crooning air she sang found its way into words after a bit,—broken, foolish words that she had made up herself chiefly for the pure sound of them:

"Where shall you find the butterfly's mate?
Here where the roses blow;
Here in the garden the roses wait
For the fluttering, glittering butterfly-mate
That the roses love and know.

"Where shall you find the eagle's mate?
Up in the air so high;
Up in the hills where the thunderbolts wait,—
There you shall find the eagle's mate,
Up by the windy sky!"

"And where," said Mrs. Breckenridge as she sewed, "did you find *that* song?"

Anemone laughed her soft laugh. "Just—found it!" she said, crushing some dry rose-petals in her palm to breathe in their aromatic sweetness. "I don't know why I put that in about the eagle," she added carelessly. "I don't like eagles."

"You never saw any," said her cousin.

"Nobody ever does except the people in the natural-history books!" laughed Anemone.

"I killed one once."

"Cousin Sally! You didn't! Tell me about it!"

Mrs. Breckenridge's lips tightened. One would have said that she regretted the innocent statement that she had made. It was with obvious unwillingness that she proceeded: "My sister Hagar and I were playing together and an eagle attacked us. I killed it with stones."

"How thrilling! But where could you have been living to get attacked by eagles?"

"We lived," said Mrs. Breckenridge slowly, "on a mountain. Near the top. Eagles are only seen in high places."

"Look!" exclaimed Anemone, springing up. "There's Mr. Hotchkiss coming across the lawn, and I'm so glad!"

"Does that mean that you like Mr. Hotchkiss so very much?" asked her cousin, looking in amazement at the squat, comfortable figure of the approaching guest.

Anemone made a little face, and chuckled. "No!" she said. "It means—tea! And I'm so hungry!"—

She darted into the house, singing her little crooning song:

"There you shall find the eagle's mate,
Up by the windy sky!"

Mr. Hotchkiss, the rector of the little Virginian parish, was a plump and cherubic person of the R. Wilfer type. He was absolutely good and as absolutely uninteresting, except in so far as his true impulses of charity might commend him. It was his misfortune that the Lord he served so faithfully had given him a fat little body and a fussy little mind which few people were able, with the most pious intentions in life, to sincerely revere. He waddled cheerily up onto the broad veranda that was richly shaded with woodbine, and plumped, beaming, into a rocking-chair opposite Mrs. Breckenridge.

"Always busy! Always busy!" he smiled. "It is charming in these days to see a lady so truly domestic!"

Mr. Hotchkiss was Southern through and through, and still said "lady" instead of woman, and even called his feminine acquaintances "ma'am." There was indeed a sort of old-world atmosphere about the little man. One of his irreverent young parishoners had once declared that, instead of clerical dress, he should have worn lace ruffles,

and some nice little knee breeches upon his chubby legs.

Mrs. Breckenridge smiled the oddly constrained welcome that was characteristic of her. Mr. Hotchkiss always felt it, and always felt vaguely puzzled and put out by it. It seemed somehow ungracious, yet his instinct told him that, in spite of her unfortunate manner, Mrs. Breckenridge was really most grateful for people's friendliness. She now, still with that oddly uncomfortable air, said:

"Anemone and I were hoping that you would come to tea."

"Ah, Anemone,—dear child!" said Mr. Hotchkiss, heartily. He was sincerely fond of Mrs. Breckenridge's young cousin. "Where is she?"

"I think she is waking up Aunt Mallie, and trying to induce her to make tea-cake!" said his hostess with her rare smile. "She is the *youngest* thing!" She sighed, with that odd sense of pathos which youth nearly always brings to maturity.

"A great comfort to you, ma'am!"

"My only comfort," said the widow, quietly, sewing steadily.

The clergyman started to speak and then hesitated. He had been about to ask some natural question as to whether Mrs. Breckenridge had not other relatives, but with intuitive delicacy, refrained. The lady had never talked of her family, and something told him that she would not encourage

curiosity. He merely contented himself with saying, "What do you hear from the nephew whom you have told me was at the University of Virginia?"

"Lancer?" A faint gleam of interest showed in her face. "I hear very well of Lancer. He has done quite brilliantly."

"Will he be coming to you later, ma'am?" asked the little man innocently.

Mrs. Breckenridge regarded her sewing for a second, and then she said slowly: "Perhaps,—later. I have never seen my nephew since he grew up. I doubt if he would enjoy coming to us much."

"I can't imagine any one not enjoying it!" said Mr. Hotchkiss, with amiable sincerity. He wiped his hot forehead, and smiled about him. "It's quite an ideal home, ma'am, that you have here!"

It did in truth look ideal. Hidden down in the valley, between great ranges of the Virginian hills, the village of Rosvallon straggled drowsily along in many lanes, with fords almost in the very streets, and a wilderness of flowers everywhere. On the very edge of the woodlands it was, and thus banked and backgrounded by deep June green; and there was about it an everlasting murmur of wind in the trees, and the echo of a distant waterfall a mile up the Gap. Just above the valley with its dream-infested little high road that crept and wound between the old, old houses and their gardens, stood the Breckenridge place on an emerald-green slope that melted

into the wild forest beyond. And there nestled the rambling dim-gray house buried in woodbine and crimson ramblers, with its brooding peace, and just a purple glimpse of hills through the gorge. Mrs. Breckenridge laid her work down upon her knee to gaze out over the trees and embowered valley. It was just the same as it had been twenty-five years ago when she had come there with James Breckenridge, a bride. Nothing was altered. A few more roses, a richer growth of leafage, a deeper silver on the unstained wood of the old house; nothing else. It was still peace and beauty made real; was it any wonder that she loved it, that she hated to leave it, even for visits? Once it had been a refuge from wild and tumultuous things; to-day it still made an island of tranquillity to which her spirit passionately clung.

She roused herself to hear Mr. Hotchkiss speaking once more.

"These are exciting times," said the good man, shaking his head with that rapt and fearful joy which most dull and virtuous persons experience in the narration of wild or violent happenings. "Have you heard the news that is turning the county upside down?"

"An arrest for moonshining, wasn't it?" said Mrs. Breckenridge, indifferently. "I heard Mollie and one of the men talking about it, I think."

"That," said Mr. Hotchkiss, impressively, "is only the beginning of the trouble, ma'am! As a

result of it,—the Mornes are out upon the war-path once more!"

He paused triumphantly, and was for a moment disappointed in the effect of his thrilling intelligence. Then he saw that, though she had neither moved nor spoken, Mrs. Breckenridge was staring at him in incredulous horror, her face chalk-white to her lips. Twice she tried to speak before she succeeded in saying, "But—but the Mornes live on—Eagle Mountain—thirty miles from here!"

"Yes, ma'am! But they have left Eagle Mountain for the time being, and are out in force! It seems that this particular seller of illicit liquor was himself one of their wild clan, and the rest of them have sworn to set him free if they have to burn the jail and kill every county officer from here to Covington!"

Mrs. Breckenridge leaned back in her chair, and her hands dropped at her sides with a despairing gesture. "The Mornes!" she muttered as though to herself. "The wildest, the most unscrupulous band of outlaws in the hills! The Mornes, who have never been convicted of one of their crimes! What have these poor people here done to be visited by that wicked clan?"

"Mrs. Breckenridge!" exclaimed Mr. Hotchkiss, in fat alarm. "You are ill, ma'am!"

"No," she rejoined in a low voice. "Not ill;—but—terrified!"

"Terrified!"

"Of—the Mornes!" she whispered. There was indeed terror in her look, as she glanced about her from right to left. It was almost as though she feared to see some sinister shape at her very elbow as she spoke. The little man looked at her in perplexity.

"But, my dear lady," he protested soothingly, "you are in no danger! They would hardly come to this house, and anyway you have men servants—"

"It is not that," said Mrs. Breckenridge. She had regained a measure of her self-control, and spoke steadily enough now, though her lips were white. "Mr. Hotchkiss, you have never, any one of you, asked me any questions about myself, since I first came here to live in Rosvallon with Mr. Breckenridge, twenty-five years ago. It has seemed to me wonderful that you have taken me so much for granted. I have never ceased to wait for the day when you would find out who I was."

"But, my dear lady," murmured good Mr. Hotchkiss, bewildered, "how could we not take you for granted? A Southern lady——"

"But I was not a Southern lady," said Mrs. Breckenridge, looking past him into the blazing green and gold of the June afternoon. "What I was, what I seemed, what I knew, I had learned from my husband. My own people—Mr. Hotchkiss, have you ever heard of Hagar Morne?"

"The sister and mother of the wild Eagle Mountain clan of outlaws? Indeed, yes! A terrible

woman, and dangerous, if all that I have heard of her is true."

"Hagar Morne is my sister," said Mrs. Breckenridge, quietly. "I was Sarah Morne, and the men who are terrorizing the county,—the lawless Morne clan,—are my own people!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MORNES OF EAGLE MOUNTAIN.

Poor Mr. Hotchkiss, not inured to unwonted shocks, paled visibly. He was not a weak man, in spite of his fat and his fussiness, but he was both simple and sensitive, and things out of his own experience upset him. He would have liked to have felt that the whole world was really as well-ordered as he would have had it had he been permitted to be omnipotent. Now he looked at his well-dressed and well-looking hostess with something bordering on distressed panic. Mrs. Breckenridge had been a pillar of his church since he first took the parochial duties of Rosvallon upon his chubby shoulders. She had always appeared as a shining example of what a Southern gentlewoman should be;—and now, out of the very sky, as it were, a clear June sky, she was being metamorphosed before his eyes; becoming spectacular and dimly sinister, a woman in a story! He shrank from her for a moment. It was one thing to talk casually and agreeably about the Mornes; it was quite another to be oneself face to face with one. A fugitive thought which his saner self rejected as absurd, suggested that this

hitherto mannerly lady might at any moment produce a revolver or a hunting knife! This weird impression passed and he looked at Mrs. Breckenridge with something bordering on compassion. Certainly for the moment she appeared the reverse of dangerous. She was, indeed, in a state of desperate and abject wretchedness and apprehension.

"Believe me," the little man said almost shyly, "I—I am inexpressibly touched, ma'am, that you should confide in me. It is curious," he rambled on,—partly, no doubt, to give her time to recover herself, "how few of my parishioners do me that honor. I think," said the Rev. Mr. Hotchkiss, humbly, "that they do not distrust me; it is only that they do not think I count." He beamed at the landscape and waited for further confidences.

"Now you know," Mrs. Breckenridge said in a low voice, "my one terror. It has always been with me,—the fear that some of my own wild outlaw family would some day turn up to disgrace me. When I turned my back on Eagle Mountain and all the lawlessness and savagery it stood for, I vowed that I would never lift a hand for them,—except Lancer!"

"Your nephew?"

"My sister Hagar's son. I have put him at college. I wanted to see if education could kill the savage in the blood of a Morne."

"He's at the University of Virginia? I have heard you speak of him, but I did not know his name was Morne."

"He changed it at my request, and calls himself Breckenridge. He is the one hope of our wild and accursed family. If he can become a decent, clean-living, law-abiding man, I feel as though part of the curse would be lifted from the race, and I would be freed of a strange, deep obligation. As it is—oh, you don't know! No one knows! It is all a sort of picturesque mystery to you, like a play or a story-book. But I've lived it. I've seen men shot, I tell you, and fired a gun myself. Once I wounded my brother-in-law, Hagar's husband, and our cousin. It was while I was getting away, to marry Jim Breckenridge. My brothers and cousins hated him because he was civilized and belonged to the civilized world. They tried to keep me, and I shot—I shot Abner in the shoulder!" She hid her face in her hands.

The clergyman looked at her wonderingly,—a little pityingly, too. For the first time he realized that Mrs. Breckenridge had all these years been hiding the heritage of her lawless blood. It was that which had given her that forced and unnatural manner at times. She was of the Morne clan, cursed with a fire in her veins, and she had been living the life of a Virginia gentlewoman for twenty-five years! Even Mr. Hotchkiss could dimly appreciate the tragedy of this.

"They are a law unto themselves," went on the woman. "They have never been punished, because every one, officers even, have been afraid of them, and they have been right to be afraid! I know!

I am a Morne and I understand them. They are as absolute despots as the robber barons of mediaeval Germany! They are without scruples or pity!" She shivered. "They call themselves 'the Eagles,' and they are like eagles, fierce and untamed and cruel."

"There is nobility in eagles," said the little man, simply.

She looked at him in a sort of wondering way, as though his uncomplex and kindly philosophy was beyond her. Perhaps she thought him something of a fool,—but she was grateful to him.

"I have feared my people always," she murmured.

"And now," he said gently, "you fear that they will come here?"

"It is a law of the clan," she said, "that no Morne can ever refuse help to another in emergency, under pain of death."

"My dear lady, you don't mean—"

"If they asked me for help or protection and I refused, they would kill me with no more hesitation than you would whip a dog that bit you."

Mr. Hotchkiss sat digesting this startling conviction of the Mornes' sister.

Anemone's pale, lovely little face gleamed in the doorway for a moment.

"Cousin Sally!" she called sweetly. "Oh, good afternoon, Mr. Hotchkiss! Wasn't it hot walking up?—Cousin Sally, may we have jam *besides* tea-cake?"

Mrs. Breckenridge nodded, speechless, and the girl vanished.

"Before she comes back," the widow went on hurriedly, "I want to ask if you and Mrs. Hotchkiss will take Anemone for a few days, just until all danger is past? Of course there is really no need, but—I should not like the child to be frightened!"

"We shall be only too glad," said the little clergyman. "But surely it will not be as bad as that? The —your family—" he stumbled a bit, "—would surely treat a young girl like that with consideration?"

"With just as much consideration as you could expect from a pack of wolves," said the woman, passionately.

In the distance they heard Anemone's clear, rather low-pitched voice singing:

"Here is the garden the roses wait
For the fluttering, glittering butterfly-mate—"

"I want to protect Anemone," said the woman in a troubled voice. "I had only storms when I was a girl—I should like this child to have only sunshine,—sunshine and moonlight, and—"

Mr. Hotchkiss looked at her in a vague astonishment. He would never had suspected Mrs. Breckenridge of sentiment.

"Young Ellsworth is attentive to her," he said, glad to switch the conversation into less painful channels.

"Yes," she said, but with not much lightening of her sombre mood. "He is a very nice fellow. I think she—likes him." But her tone expressed neither conviction nor enthusiasm.

A sudden inspiration came to Mr. Hotchkiss.

"Why don't you marry Anemone to your nephew?" he said, smiling.

Mrs. Breckenridge started upright in her chair and gazed at him. That flame which so few people had ever seen was in her eyes now.

"Why—it might be!" she said under her breath. "If Lancer has the nobility of the eagle and the training of the civilized man—he might be the one man for her!—I have never thought of it before. I wanted Anemone to have the best, but if Lancer stays at college, and keeps away from the clan—" She lapsed into deep thought.

"Well," said the clergyman, comfortably folding his hands across his fat stomach, "it is all in the hands of God!"

It was to him a very present satisfaction that this was so. The shifting of responsibility, that inherent human weakness which caused the institution of the Catholic confessional, leads many men of God to put the blame of all things on the shoulders of their over-burdened Creator.

Anemone came out gaily, followed by black Mallie and a huge, laden tea-tray.

"Tea at last, Mr. Hotchkiss!" she cried. "Was there ever a lovelier day? Do you suppose anyone *could* be sad or bad on a day like this?"

A boy with a telegram came around the corner of the house as she spoke. Mrs. Breckenridge opened the message and read it in silence. Then she laid it down with a hopeless gesture, and began aimlessly to fumble among the tea-things.

"Cousin Sally!" exclaimed Anemone. "What is it?"

"Lancer—" said Mrs. Breckenridge,—"Lancer has left the college—just disappeared. They don't know where he is."

Her voice failed her, and she met Mr. Hotchkiss' eyes. The same thought had come to both of them. Lancer had gone to join his own people—the Morne clan of Eagle Mountain!

CHAPTER III.

AFTERNOON TEA.

"AUNT MALLIE is such a funny old thing!" said Anemone, eating tea-cake with an appetite which was quite normal in spite of her ethereal appearance, "she has just been talking about a perfectly new kind of bugaboo!"

"What is that?" asked Mrs. Breckenridge, with a self-controlled quiet which only showed the little clergyman how pitifully "second nature" this repression of her emotions had become.

"The Mornes!" said Anemone, in much the tone she might have used for "The Ghouls" or "The Vampires." Her cousin set her cup down gently on the arm of her wicker chair, but otherwise made no sign of agitation.

"And what about them?" she asked with admirable calm.

"According to Aunt Mallie—" laughed Anemone. "Won't you have any more tea, Mr. Hotchkiss? Cousin Sally is neglecting you shamefully!—According to Aunt Mallie, they are a sort of cross between a cannibal and a pirate, with a dash of hobgoblin thrown in! What is a Morne really, Cousin Sally? An Indian tribe, or a secret society of criminals?"

"Morne is the name of a family," said Mrs. Breckenridge evenly. "They have done a great many lawless things, and live together in a colony of their own, that's all."

"All! It is quite enough! They sound enchanting!" said Anemone, with sparkling eyes. "Why, please, has the law let them go on like that? *I* think it's perfectly delightful, of course, but I shouldn't have thought the police would!"

"Here is Luke Ellsworth," said Mrs. Breckenridge, abruptly, as a tall man came with a strolling step up onto the veranda.

Luke Ellsworth was a lazy, blond fellow with a slow speech and a delightful warm smile. Many men were sincerely fond of Luke Ellsworth. He was not quite daring enough,—just a shade too decent, all in all,—to please women. He adored Anemone, but he had never paid her a lover's compliment in his life, and as for making love to her, he loved her far too much for that, just for the present.

"Let her be a little girl yet awhile," he said to himself, with a tenderness rare in so young a man. "There'll be time enough for her to be a woman, God bless her!" So he loved her silently, and delighted in her, and picked her wild flowers for which he went tramping before dawn that she might have them "with the dew on," and Anemone found him "nice,—but rather dull, you know, Cousin Sally."

"What has our Deputy Sheriff to say about the

Morne invasion of the county?" said Mr. Hotchkiss, stirring his third cup of tea.

Ellsworth smiled, but seriously. Being made Deputy Sheriff had meant a lot to him. A position of public trust was to his thinking, "a big thing." While he ate his cake as hungrily as Anemone herself, he answered with deliberation:

"It's time that the Mornes were brought up standing! They're just bluffing, you know. Nobody really thinks they'll shoot anyone or make trouble if one of them is punished. It's just gotten to be a sort of legend in the county—a kind of superstition." He took another bite of cake. "It's only a matter for a little nerve and common sense," he said judicially. "I have a theory about it."

Mrs. Breckenridge glanced at him with that queer fiery gleam in her eye, then seized her sewing as though it were a shield against herself.

"If I were you, Luke," she remarked dryly, "I would stick to theories, and theories only, till the Mornes get out of the county again."

Ellsworth looked at her gravely.

"I hope that I will always do my duty," he said with just a hint of gentle reproach.

"Well," said Mrs. Breckenridge, sewing hard, "I hope you won't. It's a great mistake."

The two men stared at her, wondering. She had, on a sudden, two bright patches on her thin cheeks, and looked tense and highly strung. As a matter of fact, she hardly realized, and certainly did not weigh, what she was saying. Her mind was for

the moment wholly given up to her multiplied fears. Probably foremost among these stood her native woman's terror of being "found out," exposed as a Morne, and a kinswoman of desperadoes. For twenty-five years she had spent her days and such vital energies as she possessed on the effort to be a Virginian lady, an "aristocrat" who should never by look or word or act suggest anything save the sheltered and gentle stock of other Southern gentlewomen. She had been looked up to; and, her antecedents to the contrary, Sarah Breckenridge was of the sort that loves to be looked up to. In a moment she saw her house of honor imperilled, perhaps razed to the ground. The women she had patronized would turn from her in horror. She would exchange the delicate fare of exclusiveness for that bitter bread eaten by the isolated. This guerdon for which she had willingly forsworn her own race,—the place among the softer-fleshed and softer-souled people of the cultivated valleys,—she was close to losing; and that danger leaped foremost in her mind, as she reviewed the situation.

Next came her fear for Anemone's peace of mind; her apprehension lest her people make some succinct disturbance, some active claim upon the obligations of her kinship and blood. The various and varying things which she dreaded whirled into a general vortex of panic. And there was yet something else, too. Lancer Morne, her nephew,—he whom she had thought to remake under the name of Lancer Breckenridge,—had reverted to the claims

that she had thrust aside. With a queer, almost subconscious sense of obligation to her people she had conceived the notion of paying her blood-debt to them in this new coin: the coin of civilization. She who had given them up for the sake of law and order would give them law and order personified in this youth, a gift in return for her life and loyalty which she had filched from them. Such, in a measure, had been her thought. But that, too, had been denied her. She saw herself stripped of all that went with her position and her mental attitude, and she knew that, brought to bay before the Mornes, her brothers, she was likely to suffer, for the standards of these eaglish outlaws were high and hard. . . .

"Swing low, sweet chariot," sang Aunt Mallie from afar, the sweet, nasal, minor strain floating round the corner of the house. Aunt Mallie was always singing; especially at dusk did her sentimental African soul burst forth romantically like some long-leashed, melancholy hound to bay the moon. The note of pathos, strangely at one with all negro music, swelled out and mingled with the perfume of the roses. In the South, indeed, it is true that "music and moonlight and feeling are one." Or, failing moonlight, the sunset glow will mix as magically with sound and sentiment.

Luke Ellsworth, in spite of his self-restraint, was very much a man and a man in love, and as he gazed at Anemone in the dusk, his eyes grew big with the yearnings that crowded unspoken, up from

his heart. But he allowed himself no license because of the hour,—not even though Mrs. Breckenridge was staring absent-mindedly toward the mountain range across the valley.

"You're looking as pretty as a—a daisy, Anemone," he said, smiling at her. His compliment was the gentle homage of a brother. Though it held in it nothing that could possibly hurt or jar her, she felt vaguely irritated.

"Thank you, Luke," she said carelessly, "but whoever cares about daisies? No one ever picks them."

Luke Ellsworth looked at her, and his smile was exquisitely caressing, though she was far too young and unformed to read it so.

"Sometimes," he said softly, "daisies are prettier in the field, before they are picked."

The sun was dropping almost out of sight, and the valley was full of the color and music and mystery of swiftly coming eventide, for night grows apace among the mountains. The voices of birds thrilled through the sweet quiet, and the sky flushed and changed with a hundred melting tones of loveliness. Against the deepening sky, Anemone's delicate little profile showed pearl-white and clear as marble in bas-relief. Her dress, white, too, made of her a small ghost among the growing and darkening shadows. Restlessly she got up and walked to the end of the veranda.

Mr. Hotchkiss cleared his throat, to break the silence. "Let us pray," he said very blandly, "let

us pray that the—er—Mornes will create no disturbance in Rosvallon!—er—er—dear, dear!" added the little man hurriedly, "it is getting on toward six o'clock! Nearly dinner-time! You are so *very* beguiling!" He chuckled innocently, and shook hands all around. "Where is Anemone?" he asked. For Anemone had suddenly slipped away under cover of the twilight.

"Probably with Aunt Mallie," said Mrs. Breckenridge, with some constraint. She knew that Ellsworth bored Anemone and that she was apt to vanish from his presence when occasion offered. "Mr. Hotchkiss, you won't forget the favor I asked you, in case of an emergency."

"Of course not, my dear lady," exclaimed the little man in an earnest flutter. "But let us pray—let us pray it will not be necessary. Let us pray—"

He checked himself, recognizing a rather oppressive professionalism in the reiteration and trotted away, sniffing the evening air like a plump and friendly little dog.

"And now, Luke," said Mrs. Breckenridge quietly, laying down her sewing, "please tell me really the latest news about—the Mornes. Is it really likely that they will make trouble in Rosvallon?"

Luke Ellsworth looked up.

"Every man we can get is guarding the county jail," he said, quietly. "Don't be frightened if you hear shooting to-night. The Mornes have threatened to set Abner Morne free before morning."

Mrs. Breckenridge trembled, but he did not see it. With an effort she went on:

"But it is thirty miles to their stronghold on Eagle Mountain."

"Yes," said Luke Ellsworth, "but they are not on Eagle Mountain. The Morne clan, or every man they have been able to get hold of in their neighborhood, are on their way here. They are barely ten miles away now, and will be in Rosvallon ready for business in two hours."

CHAPTER IV.

MOONRISE.

It was two hours later. Anemone had stolen away to the pasture at the foot of the garden to see the moon rise. It was just after sunset. In the dusk everything becomes possible; it is the most magical, the most hopeful hour of the twenty-four. Just as the dead of night breeds imaginings fantastic and grotesque, fancies of impossible and nightmarish horror at which the saner intellect can afford to laugh; just as the first gray dawn hour brings the chill of desolation and the blankness of hope foregone, so the twilight trembling between the rose-flush of sunset and the splendor of the young moon-filled night brings delight. That vision that this morning we thought was buried deep,—see it like a mist wreath, down among the roses; that voice of desire that mocked us cruelly in the small hours last night—is it not calling again from the shadows, luring us with tongues of angels—and of men?

Anemone, lifting her white skirts daintily, went loitering down through the dew-wet thickets, with

her hair like a black cloud about her face. A bramble pricked her ankle and a twig slapped her cheek lightly, but she laughed at both as at the teasing of impish children. She was in a wild, glad, venturesome mood, ready to dance with the Little People or consort with wood nymphs. . . .

She made her way to the pasture fence and leaning there, gazed out over the curving hill to where the moon was shortly to rise. Already the glow was there,—silver, pale, mysterious.

In this impalpable light the wet grass glimmered here and there like silver. The smell of clover and leaves came in a whiff of incense that grew stronger with every throb of the deepening night. A cool breath from the east puffed suddenly and softly in her face; a cricket chirped loudly close by, and her ears began to hear other sounds, small and innumerable night songs from field and shrubbery. A huge bough of blackberries grew over the fence close beside her. She pulled some and ate them because the flavor of them was like the evening itself; they tasted the way the June world smelled. And then—something moved on the other side of the fence, and between her and the dimly glowing east was a shadow. She shrank and shivered, but the presence was still too intangible to really frighten her. So do ghosts or dreams come out of the gloaming. But it was a man's voice that spoke:

"If you're as nearly a fairy as you look, perhaps you can tell me where I can find a drink of water."

To her ears, used to the indolent speech of the Virginia valleys, the words sounded quickly spoken. There was a full vibration in them, and a note of nervous energy odd to her. There was something living and vivid in a voice like that.

The man's body, dark against the shimmer of the sky-line, looked supernaturally tall. But Anemone was in a freakish mood. Though her heart beat a little she answered as quickly: "Is it a fairy well you are looking for?"

"Good," said the man irrelevantly. "You aren't the hysterical sort at any rate. No, pretty lady, any plain ordinary workaday well will do me, or even a brown jug, if you have one by you."

"In a minute," said the girl daringly, pointing one slim hand over his shoulder, "the moon will be up, and then you can have *moonshine!*"

"Why, I love you for that!" said the man with a little delighted chuckle. "How did you spring up in this hedged-in valley?"

"It's not hedged in!" said Anemone. "Of if it is, it's hedged with roses."

"You live here?" He seemed surprised.

"Where else?"

"In Fairyland, perhaps," he suggested.

"It's the same thing," said Anemone.

She could see that he shook his head.

"Never!" he declared. "What! Fairyland a place full of hedges and rose gardens! . . ."

"I love roses better than anything else in the world," she said.

"That's the best thing I have heard said [a]
them yet! I'm fonder of the things that grow w[ild]
myself. What is your name, Fairy Lady?"

"Anemone," she said.

"Anemone! Why, that's a wild flower—what th[ey]
call a wind flower, isn't it? I told you that y[ou]
were no rose-garden fairy!"

"No, you didn't," she corrected. "You said y[ou]
liked wild flowers better than—"

" 'Tis the same thing!" he threw back in his tu[rn].

Anemone felt herself flush a little. But she sai[d]
easily, "Meanwhile you have tasted neither of fairy
well nor moonshine."

"I have found something better," he declared, a[nd]
she knew,—though she could not see his eyes,—tha[t]
he was staring at her intently, "or shall have, whe[n]
the moon rises!—I have no thirst now; or, at leas[t]
not for water. . . ."

"Oh, look!" cried Anemone, softly, for the firs[t]
keen silver moon-edge had cut its way sharply u[p]
over the dark and rounded hill slope. The firs[t]
moonbeam gleamed in her eyes, and a wind tha[t]
came from the east and seemed the moon's ow[n]
breath lifted her black hair above her forehead.

The man so close to her on the other side o[f]
the fence leaned suddenly across it. A slantin[g]
ray of moonlight touched his face; it was a strange
one to her, but one never to be strange again. Keen
eyes, strong nose and chin, and laughing mouth.
She knew she should not soon forget it. The hair,

a bird caught by an eagle, you would know it was no use to struggle."

rough and tumbled above it, might be any color except black.

He caught her wrist and pulled her closer still to the fence; her face was near his and she felt startled and outraged.

"Don't struggle," said the man and his lips still laughed at her. The glinting moonbeam showed his eyes, bold but frank, a foot from hers. "If you were a bird, caught by an eagle, you would know it was no use to struggle!"

Caught by an eagle!—Was everything to turn to eagles to-day?—Inconsequently a line from her own foolish song drummed on her brain: "*Where shall you find the eagle's mate?*"

She did not struggle. She stood still, and looked straight and fearlessly back at him. For the moment she was not frightened, but she was angry, and she looked it. The man laughed outright, and dropped her wrist.

"You don't belong here," he told her. "I shall come back for you one of these days. . . I almost kissed you then."

"I know it," said Anemone coolly, with a sort of icy fire in her.

They stared at each other defiantly in the spreading moonlight.

"I shall come back for you," said the man again, and, abruptly as he had appeared, he passed into the darkness. . . . Anemone heard Aunt Mallie's querulous old nasal voice calling for her and sud-

denly fell to shivering violently. For a moment she stood, shaking from head to foot, in the warm, pure moonlight; then fled back through the shadows toward the house.

CHAPTER V.

THE RIDERS IN THE NIGHT.

WHEN Anemone got to the parlor the lamps had been lighted, and the pretty room was bathed in a soft warm yellow glow. But in the midst of it all sat Mrs. Breckenridge with the telegram crumpled in her hand, and a look of worry on her white face. She glanced constantly in the direction of the French windows which stood open to the soft night air, and when Anemone entered the room she started as though her nerves were on edge.

"Oh, Cousin Sally, Cousin Sally! dear—what is it?" cried Anemone, making a little rush for the older woman's chair. But Cousin Sally was rocking back and forth in a sort of dry grief which somehow abashed the girl. She paused at her cousin's side, checking the impulsively affectionate movement of her hands, and said timidly, "Dear Cousin Sally, isn't there anything I can do?"

Mrs. Breckenridge shook her head and tried to pull herself together.

"It is—nothing," she declared, painfully. "I am unstrung, that is all." Suddenly she put out a tense hand and touched Anemone's slim fingers.

"You'd better marry Luke Ellsworth, child," she said. There was a sort of tenderness in her usually hard voice. "He is *safe;* and oh, my girl, a woman wants to be safe in this world!"

"But I don't understand," said Anemone, wondering. "Why should I have to marry anybody to be safe?"

"I don't know how to explain it," said her cousin, pushing the coarse hair from her forehead. "It all seems senseless when I put it into words. But to-night I feel as though pretty much everything in the world was uncertain and dangerous."

"Dear Cousin Sally," said the girl, comfortingly. "You are upset with all this stupid talk of the Mornes, and burning the jail and the rest of it. You feel as though something were going to happen, but you know even if they do burn a jail or two it won't hurt us. I think it's rather exciting myself."

"Exciting!" muttered her cousin.

"Can't you just think of it as a story?" Anemone rattled on gaily. "Just pretend it's all happening in a book? Then I'm sure you'd enjoy it instead of getting nervous."

"You don't understand," her cousin muttered.

Rather shyly Anemone moved nearer to her. "I—wish—I did—understand, Cousin Sally," she said, softly. "Couldn't you tell me about—things? I know you're worried. Won't you tell me?"

If anyone had told Mrs. Breckenridge that the day would ever come when she would find comfort

and relief in telling the story of her birth and her girlhood, she would have laughed aloud. Yet, that day was here. Like a woman in a dream, she found herself speaking in low tones of Eagle Mountain, and those old, dead, wild times which she had come to think of almost as the happenings in another lifetime. She talked monotonously, without feeling, and yet through all pulsed a passionate reality which thrilled the girl who listened more than ever romance or tale of adventure had yet thrilled her. The daughter of the Mornes spoke of fights among the rough people who were her kinsmen, sieges which they had sustained at the hands of the law, struggles among themselves, battles for hate and love and power and revenge. She spoke of stormy nights when the hillside was swept with wind and rain and a horse could hardly stand against it, when she and her sister had carried messages from one to another of the clan. She talked of fierce enmities and incredible loyalties, when men gave their lives for each other with the same wild carelessness with which they would take the lives of those with whom they were at war. Somehow as she talked Anemone seemed to get a strange yet vivid picture of the Mornes of Eagle Mountain,—men and women who were free, savage, and somehow magnificent in their lawlessness. Despite her instinctive shrinking from such savagery, she felt her very soul stirred with this alien and insistent music,—the music of the waste places on the untouched summits of the hills.

She looked at her cousin with eyes greatly wondering.

"And *you*—have lived through all that!" she murmured.

Mrs. Breckenridge interrupted her with a peremptory gesture, and rose to her feet.

"Hark!" she said quickly.

As they both stood listening, everything seemed abnormally still; hardly a cricket chirped; barely a stir of wind sounded in the trees. The night seemed to wait, expectant, the hour hung poised, suspended on the thread of time. Anemone hardly dared to breathe and her heart sounded loud inside her breast.

Suddenly it came, what it seemed they had been waiting for, the very faint, very distant sound of horses' hoofs coming nearer on the road below,—not rapidly, but at a walk; not one horse nor two,—but many. It is a curious sound at night, the quiet, steady approach of a company of horsemen. Women hear it during their night vigils in war times and, unknowing whether it is friend or foe that comes, feel a catch in the throat. Tonight the hoofbeats sounded like a hurried heart,—no, like drops of water falling hastily on a stone,—and yet there was no speed in the pace that brought those unseen riders nearer. They were coming into the town quietly and without haste or unnecessary noise. Farther down, in the valley, doubtless they would not be heard for some minutes yet. The Breckenridge house stood high enough to catch every ascending echo. There was

even a faint distant voice that died instantly into the night stillness.

The hoofbeats came on, and Mrs. Breckenridge put her hand to her throat.

Anemone's blood was racing madly; she was not at all frightened, but she had never been so excited in her life. It was like a dream, a wild adventurous dream. This afternoon she had been making *pot-pourri* and helping Aunt Mallie set the tea-tray. Tonight there had been the mysterious man by the pasture fence at moonrise, Mrs. Breckenridge's strange talk of Eagle Mountain, and now the riders coming through the night. She thrilled with the sense of new and perhaps wild happenings. Never before had she suspected her own heart of any kinship with violence or daring. Tonight she truly believed herself capable of anything.

Sarah Breckenridge, glancing at her young face, saw in it a white flame of excitement and no jot of fear. And an odd answering thrill leaped in her own blood. The girl was not afraid. How dared she, a Morne, know panic, when a young thing like that stood above it in a white-hot mood?

"Call Wakeman," she said, "and tell him to lock the front door, and Mallie may as well shut up the kitchen."

Anemone, wondering a little, obeyed. Why should her cousin want the house locked up? Surely she did not really think that the riders in the night would come here,—to their peaceful house among the roses?

She found Aunt Mallie with characteristic darky

pessimism, preparing for battle, murder and sudden death, and singing hymns.

"Dem Mornes," she moaned as she wobbled about the kitchen. "Dey gwine buhn us all in our beds, Miss 'Nemony. You listen to yo' ole Aun' Mallie. Ain' gwine to be no Rosvallon taown tomorro'. We all gwine ter be gone to glory,—oh, mah Lawd, receive mah po' ole soul!"

"Nonsense, Aunt Mallie," said Anemone, laughing outright. "What would the Mornes want to burn you up for?"

Aunt Mallie shook her head and put a tub of water against the kitchen door.

"I don' know, child," she remarked mournfully. " 'Specs dey lak to see a po' ole nigger lady frizzlin' up, dat's all."

"But," persisted Anemone, "there are Sheriffs and people down in the village to take care of them."

Aunt Mallie snorted scornfully.

"Sho!" she ejaculated. "Reckon yo' thinks dat Sheriffs kin take keer ob de debbil? Case less'n dey kin, dey cyan' take keer ob dese 'ere Mornes. No, ma'am! Dey's all debbils straight outer hell, Miss 'Nemony!"

"Aunt Mallie!" remonstrated Anemone, severely.

But Aunt Mallie had now seated herself in a large chair, tied a blue bandanna about her head, and began to sing: "Jes' a-inchin' along, jes' a-inchin' along to Jesus," while she waited to be murdered.

Laughing heartily, and altogether out of her exalted mood of five minutes before, Anemone went

back to the sitting-room. At the door she stopped as though she were seized by an invisible hand. For at the French window stood a man, a young man, barely more than a boy, tall, lithe, tawny-haired; with daring eyes, aquiline nose, and a mocking mouth,—the mouth that had laughed so close to hers in the moonlight an hour since. As she stood petrified with bewilderment, she could still hear the hoof-beats echoing on the road below,—nearer, much nearer, by this. She tore her eyes from the stranger to look at her cousin. Mrs. Breckenridge was staring at the newcomer with eager interest, but no fear.

"How like!" she whispered,—or was it Anemone's fancy?—"how strangely like!—"

The stranger spoke. Anemone felt a little thrill at the quick vibrant tone.

"Well, Aunt Sally," he said, smiling, "I'm afraid it's no use. You've been very good to me, and I'm much obliged, but I'm going back to my own people. You'll never civilize a Morne of Eagle Mountain!"

CHAPTER VI.

LANCER.

Sarah Breckenridge moistened her dry lips.

"Yes, you can," she said curtly. "I've civilized myself."

He laughed.

"I'm not so sure," he said. "I wouldn't bet that, if you had to, you wouldn't pull a gun as quick as anyone. You used to anyhow!" He chuckled again as he saw her wince.

Anemone thought that she had never seen anyone so glowing and vivid in her life. He was bronze-gold of hair and skin, and his eyes were hot, brilliant blue, —not unlike Mrs. Breckenridge's own; only, unlike hers, they stared boldly, candidly out to meet the gaze of the world at large, and were seldom veiled by the lids. So do some birds look which are able to face the sun without hurt. With his ruffled, rough bright hair and the lean fine line of jaw and throat and shoulder, his head was a splendid one and carried splendidly. His body, thin as a greyhound's and absolutely graceful, was the body of

supple youth. He wore rough riding clothes and was bareheaded.

There was something clean and wild and primitive about him, yet shot through with race and spirit, like a noble animal. Again the thought of the eagle flashed through Anemone's mind. This man, even as the eagle, could breast storms and tear his prey from an enemy; he could wound, or protect,—he could look upon the naked sun without shrinking.

"You are very like your father," said Mrs. Breckenridge, gazing at him. She had not reseated herself, but stood there, tall and commanding in her sober and rich dark gown with the impeccable lace collar.

"I suppose I am like dad," said the stranger. "I hope so—I'd rather be like him than any man I ever knew."

"Abner was handsome," said Abner's sister-in-law slowly. She seemed to be thinking, recalling, comparing, fascinated by the resurrection of her own past. In her trim and lady-like clothes, and her highly civilized surroundings, she was seeing visions of the wind-swept mountain where she had played, almost as savage as the birds that she had fought and killed.

"He is handsome," said her nephew, "and strong, except that his eyes have bothered him. And he's the bravest man I ever saw. He can shoot straighter, sit a horse tighter, and manage men better than anyone in Virginia!"

His pride was patent; it advertised itself jubilantly, and his eyes glowed like the sky at midday. But Mrs. Breckenridge looked at him in a sort of wonder.

"And after two years at college," she said, "it is those things that count most with you?"

"What else is there to count?" he said, laughing.

"Lancer Morne," said his aunt, rather heavily, "I wanted you to redeem your people. I wanted you to be a man, not a savage. I wanted you to be fine, and upright, and decent, under the law."

Anemone's head whirled. "Lancer Morne!" Then this was one of the terrible Mornes? But "Lancer!" Cousin Sally had a nephew at college called Lancer, but his name was Breckenridge. The woman was still speaking.

"That is why I educated you, why I took you from that devil's colony up in the hills, and tried to let you make something of yourself. I—" she paused for a breath,—"I felt a debt to my people."

"I know," said Lancer, coolly and rather cruelly. "You shot my father once, and it weighed on your conscience, didn't it?"

"He was my favorite cousin, and my sister's husband," said Mrs. Breckenridge, just a quiver passing over her thin, rather hard face, a quiver instantly stilled. "He loved me, but he tried to stand between me and the man I wanted." Uncon-

sciously she was using the primitive phraseology of primitive folk—"And I fought!"

"Sure!" said Lancer Morne, with entire simplicity. "Dad wouldn't think the less of you for that. The eagles have always fought for their mates."

Again Anemone felt that odd little thrill that seemed to check her blood for a second's space, then let it leap forward in a torrent. She had not been consciously eavesdropping, but now she realized that she was listening without their knowledge, and trembling a little, she walked into the room. Lancer wheeled quickly and she was almost dazzled by the fire of his eyes and the light of his whole glowing face.

"The Fairy Lady!" he exclaimed. "Aunt Sally, does this particular wild flower grow in many southern gardens?"

Mrs. Breckenridge looked from one to the other, puzzled.

"Where did you ever see Anemone before?" she demanded quickly and suspiciously.

"On a moonshining expedition!" he responded teasingly. His eyes never left Anemone's lovely little white face in its black cloud of hair. She could not know that, in her white gown, and with her great gray eyes like pools of silver, she was the most exquisite thing that Lancer Morne had ever seen. She could not guess, either, that some strange deep instincts in him recognized elements in her of

which she was herself utterly ignorant; that he was sounding her very soul in that enveloping brilliant look of his that pierced her eyes until it hurt.

With an effort she spoke, answering Mrs. Breckenridge's puzzled frown. "It was when I was down by the pasture fence, watching the moon rise. He—asked me for some water."

"Which I didn't get," struck in Lancer. His smile flashed to her in an incomprehensible manner. "I didn't get—anything!" he supplemented. And Anemone dropped her eyes.

Mrs. Breckenridge dismissed the matter abruptly. "And what are you doing here?"

Lancer Morne looked at her, suddenly grave.

"Did you know," he said, "that my father was in that jail down there?" He pointed with a vigorous, almost violent gesture down the valley.

"Yes," said Mrs. Breckenridge, "for breaking the law."

The young man frowned angrily.

"Breaking the law!" he flashed. "Yes! I am proud of him for doing it. He sold stuff that he made himself and made well, and because he wouldn't give the government part of his profit, they put him in jail!"

His aunt's mouth twisted in rather a grim smile.

"Lancer," she said, "did you take Political Economy at the University?"

"Damn Political Economy!" cried Lancer, but he laughed again. "You see it's no use, as I said before,

Aunt Sally," he proceeded. "I'm uncivilized and my ethics are uncivilized."

"Ethics!" repeated the woman dully. "Have you any?"

"Yes," he returned promptly. "Oh, I reckon they're ethics you understand, too, Aunt Sally. You belong to us whether you like it or not. You're a Morne, and you know what Mornes are made of, what they'll do, and what they won't do. You know we've our code."

"Code!" she said bitterly. "I recognize no code of the Mornes!"

"You may have to some day," he told her with a flash in his blue eyes. "The first part of the Morne code is 'Stand together.' We're nothing if not loyal. Some time, in spite of yourself, you may have to be loyal, too!"

There was something imperative and ominous in his tone, and Mrs. Breckenridge paled before this confirmation of her second fear. The boy seemed to be speaking with authority; he was one of the big dominant eagle clan. Suddenly a thought struck her.

"You are with them then tonight?"

"Of course," he said at once. "They sent for me and so I left college. They told me that my father was in prison. I am going to set him free tonight."

"*You* are going to?"

"I;—and Fisher Morne, my cousin, and my two

uncles and the rest. There are quite a bunch of us now you know!"

"You are ranging yourself with those lawless, wild, cruel creatures of the hills?"

"Yes! They are my people, and the life calls me!—as it must have called you many times, Aunt, these twenty years past!"

There was a brief second's silence; then Mrs. Breckenridge said, pointing, "Those horses that passed just now—"

"They are ours!" he nodded. "I rode ahead of them two hours, and my beast is tied up in the wood above here. I wanted to see you, to thank you for the chance you offered me,—and—to give it back to you. I don't want to graduate, Aunt Sally, I want to go back to the hills and to the clan, and freedom!"

Again, quite irrelevantly as it seemed, he met Anemone's eyes, and held them just a second.

Then a shot rang out in the distance.

The two women gasped, but Lancer threw up his head with a sort of savage exultation.

"My signal!" he said. "Good-bye, Aunt Sally! Good-bye, Wind Flower! You could grow better higher up the mountain, take my word for it!"

His blue eyes blazed into hers; he smiled mockingly, triumphantly at the two women,—and was gone. In a minute more they heard the crash and scramble of his horse in the undergrowth as he galloped recklessly across the lawn and jumped the

thicket at the end. Five minutes later the valley echoed with shot upon shot. Mrs. Breckenridge trembled with a forgotten excitement.

"See!" gasped Anemone from the long window.

A ruddy glare rose in the darkness from the far end of Rosvallon.

"It is the jail!" said Mrs. Breckenridge below her breath. "They are burning the jail!"

The uproar down the valley snapped some tension between the two. Anemone spoke breathlessly:

"Cousin Sally! Is he one of the Mornes?

"Yes," said Mrs. Breckenridge, staring, frowning and tense, into the darkness. "And so am I! Hark! Wasn't that a shout?"

"I don't believe we could hear a shout from here," said Anemone, listening. "Are—they—the Mornes—as dangerous as people say?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Breckenridge again. She leaned forward anxiously. "Is the fire dying down, Anemone?"

"I think so. Cousin Sally, is the man in the jail down there—someone belonging to you?"

"My sister's husband," Mrs. Breckenridge spoke tersely, as though for the moment she had neither time nor strength for many words. "And Lancer's father."

Anemone caught a quivering breath, and clenched her small hands.

"Oh, no wonder he went back to them!" she cried passionately. "No wonder he didn't care about col-

lege, or law, or—or anything when they called for him to help free his father!"

Suddenly she pressed her hands, still clenched, against her young breast. There was a look of startling fierceness on her face. "It must be wonderful," she whispered, "to fight—like that—for someone you care for, someone you owe loyalty to! I—oh, can understand burning, and shooting, doing *anything*, at a time like this!"

"Anemone!" exclaimed Mrs. Breckenridge, not so much shocked as astounded. A shiver passed over the girl, and with a sort of start she seemed to wake, as though from a dream. For a moment her face had been lighted by a wild, uncivilized fire. Her gray eyes had blazed weirdly, her cloudy hair had seemed curiously to suggest the floating unbound locks of a Valkyr. But the dark enchantment, whatever it was, had passed, and she looked small and pale and a little dazed by so many strange and unwonted happenings.

"I—I don't think there is so much shooting," Mrs. Breckenbridge said, with all the thrill gone out of her voice. "Do you suppose they've got him out?"

From the kitchen came Aunt Mallie's whining wail:

> "Nobody knows de troubles Ah sees,—
> Nobody knows—nobody knows."

Wakeman, the dignified negro butler, appeared at the door, pale under his dark skin.

"Missis," he said, "dere's a boy come from down thyarabouts an' he says deys been a plumb heap o' fightin', an' half-a-dozen folks shot up!"

"Have they got him out?" demanded Anemone. Wakeman blinked at her; his brain was numb with panic.

"Out? Yes'm; yes, Miss 'Nemony, I reckon dey got the fire pretty well out."

"Not the fire!" exclaimed the girl, impatiently. "The man."

"What man?" asked Wakeman, feebly. Anemone could have slapped him; she felt unaccountably unstrung and irritable. Her pulses were pounding, and when she walked she found that her legs were not steady.

Mrs. Breckenridge caught her arm suddenly.

"There's someone coming up the path of the lawn!" she muttered sharply.

They listened, but the night was silent. There was no more shooting; the fire at the jail had died down to a faint, reddish glow, against which a fringe of slender poplars showed black and delicate.

"It was nothing," said Anemone at last.

Another pause.

"Is the front door bolted?" asked Mrs. Breckenridge suddenly.

Wakeman nodded. Then—

"I told you!" the woman exclaimed under her breath. "There *was* someone!"

They stood and looked at each other, as a knock, loud and imperative, sounded at the front door.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMING OF THE CLAN.

"OPEN the door," said Mrs. Breckenridge.

She was colorless, but completely self-possessed at present, and her voice was one to be obeyed. Wakeman, with terror, began to shuffle toward the door. Just before he opened it the knock came again, and his hand dropped from the bolt.

"Fo' de Lawd, Missis!" he groaned. "If it's de Mornes, we—all'd better say our prays just-off!"

"Who is there?" asked Mrs. Breckenridge, harshly.

A man's voice, rough and deep, with a strong Virginia twist to the words, answered, "Open the door for the Mornes!" It was the old, arrogant demand, which had been made for generations by the clan on marauding jaunts, and Wakeman nearly dropped in his tracks.

Mrs. Breckenridge glanced at Anemone. The girl was looking eagerly and without fear at the closed door. The fierce gleam had left her eyes, but she was plainly absorbed in the drama of the moment,

and oblivious to any possible menace. It was the older woman who walked deliberately forward and drew back the heavy bolt.

She turned the knob, opened the door wide and stood aside, without a word. A group of men were crowded outside close to the doorway. They were roughly and coarsely dressed, and were nearly all heavily bearded and with long straggling hair. Several faces, bronzed and savage, were streaked and dabbled with blood.

Two of them carried between them one of their number, limp and unconscious, with an ugly dripping gash down the side of his head, and a uselessly hanging arm. The men who carried him were strangely alike, though one was in his early twenties and the other was sixty-five or seventy at the least. The younger was Lancer Morne, flushed under his golden tan, with a torn sleeve and a smear of blood on his hand. The other was a man of the same look, with broad streaks of tawny red in his white hair, and a great white-and-yellow beard lying on his breast; a man, in his primitive, savage way, as handsome as his son,—Abner Morne, the present head of the clan.

Mrs. Breckenridge took a step forward.

"I am glad you are free, Abner Morne," she said with a quaint, almost mediaeval formality.

The big man looked at her, leaning forward as though he did not see distinctly, and smiled into his beard.

"You're quite a fine lady these days, Sally!" he remarked, "Get a bed ready for Fisher. One of those damned Sheriffs caught him with a bullet, but I think it's only a shave."

It was the sole greeting of the Mornes, man and woman, after twenty-five years.

"Abner!" protested Mrs. Breckenridge in her rich dark dress with the lace collar. "You're not going to bring the man *here*? You cannot! I—"

"You've gotten off pretty easy, Sally," said Abner Morne, imperturbably. "You better think yourself lucky that the Mornes ask no more of you than shelter for one of their wounded."

Mrs. Breckenridge, with a sort of hopeless gesture, turned to Anemone.

"Get Aunt Mallie and have the spare room gotten ready," she said, briefly.

Anemone flew to obey her. Abner Morne and his son had brought the unconscious man into the house by this time and laid him on a heavy wooden settee that stood in the hallway. He was a young fellow, only a few years older than Lancer, but with a heavy, sullen face, darker than most of the Mornes, and a stubble of unshaven beard. Mrs. Breckenridge, as impersonally as though she were an automaton, walked into the dining-room and returned with a decanter of whiskey. She gave this to her brother-in-law and stood by while he forced a few drops down the man's throat. She looked on as though he were a botanical exhibition. Abner glanced at her.

"Your fine-lady business hasn't made you finicky, Sally," he remarked, grimly. "You're no more turned by a bit of blood than you used to be. Though I'll lay that the last wounded man you've seen was when you plugged me five-and-twenty years ago!"

He laughed roughly, and opened the man's collar.

"Who is he?" asked Mrs. Breckenridge.

"Fisher Morne, one of Mark Morne's sons. The other—you remember?—was shot by the revenue people two years ago. We strung up two officers for that, and left them by the court house for a warning."

He spoke with quiet satisfaction. Anemone, returning with a fleet step, heard him, and shuddered. To her remorse, she felt a little faint and sick. She was unused to blood and violence and this light talk of death, and strong as her spirit might be, her nerves revolted.

But she caught Lancer Morne's eyes, and for some inexplicable reason was moved by something in them to brace herself afresh.

"The room is ready, Cousin Sally," she said, unsteadily. "And—and I sent Wakeman off to bed. I thought you'd rather not have him round."

Before Mrs. Breckenridge could speak, Abner Morne had wheeled and was staring at her with his fierce, yet peering blue eyes so curiously like Lancer's and all the Mornes', except for the frowning lines of his big brows.

"Who is that girl, Sally?" he demanded.

"A cousin of my husband's," said his sister-in-law.

"How old are you, girl?" asked Abner Morne.

Anemone felt his eyes, cruel and yet calculating,—felt them from head to foot, and down to her soul.

"Eighteen," she responded.

"A marrying age," said the man, scowling at her. "Is she promised, Sally?"

Lancer struck in so sharply that they were all startled. "You've no time for that now, dad!"

His father turned on him with a smouldering anger.

"Are you hurrying me?" he demanded roughly. "You college-bred baby, are you hurrying Abner Morne that fathered you?"

Lancer whitened under his sunburn. "That's just what I am doing," he returned coolly and promptly. "I've given my word to the clan to bring you safe back to Eagle Mountain before dawn and I'll do it in spite of you, if necessary!"

There was no affection in his face at present, only a savage and stern determination. Strangely enough it seemed to please the old man.

"Young blood!" said Abner Morne, looking at his son, with a sombre pride. "It was ever the young blood that led the Mornes. It's time for the lads, Lancer and Fisher, to head the clan. We must find them wives."

His lowering blue eyes shifted to Anemone. "The Mornes need new blood," he muttered. "One must find some girls from the valley for our young men.

The Mornes have mated with Mornes till we're a race inbred; the new generation, the children, will be the weaker for it. New blood, 'tis that which is needed, a clean valley strain to temper the blood of the eagles!"

He had talked slowly and heavily, as though forgetful of those who listened. Strong and big-framed as he was, he now gave a curious impression of powerlessness, as though he had in truth abdicated like a chieftain in favor of his lustier son.

"You are unchanged, Abner," said Sarah Breckenridge.

But, even as she spoke, he turned his eyes full on her and she shrank a little, puzzled and a trifle startled by what she felt rather than saw.

"Unchanged?" he repeated. "Is the eagle unchanged when it cannot look any longer at the sun?"

"What do you mean?" she demanded. Yet almost as she spoke she knew. The splendid blue eyes, fiery and piercing, were different, she could not say how.

There was something vaguely pathetic in the way in which the man turned toward his son, as though asking him to put the thing into words. There was something even more touching in the tenderness which was in Lancer's face as he stepped to Abner Morne's side and laid his hand, strong and encouraging, upon the huge arm.

"Dad's eyes aren't quite up to their standard, Aunt Sally," was all he said, but it needed no more,—

hardly his pitiful look to tell Abner Morne's sister-in-law that the chieftain of the clan was going blind.

"I am sorry," she faltered. It was almost a shock to her to find that she spoke the truth, and that she was indeed sorry.

"Boots and saddles, dad," Lancer said, briefly. "Aunt Sally, we leave you a hostage. See that you use him well or you'll be sorry!" He laughed, but he meant it. "He'll heal quickly—the Mornes have clean blood; until then see that he is bothered with neither mosquitoes nor Sheriffs! Where shall we put him?"

She nodded silently, then turned to the young girl.

"That will do, Anemone, you can go to bed yourself," she said.

"Oh, Cousin Sally,"—the girl protested.

The big man struck in roughly:

"The girl's no fool, and she has nerve. She hasn't fainted nor screamed yet, and she has had sense enough to send that darky servant of yours away. Damn it, I say let her stay up. She's got too good stuff in her to be ordered about like a little girl."

His glance appraised her. Anemone felt vaguely uncomfortable. She was not reassured by her cousin's attitude. Mrs. Breckenridge made an involuntary gesture of protest; she was breathing quickly.

"Abner!" she said quickly in a low voice. "All this is very hard on Anemone. I wish—I really *want* her to go to bed. She has been protected always from unpleasant things."

"You'll need her to help with Fisher," said the older Morne curtly. "Lend a hand, Lancer. And you, girl, go ahead and give us a light."

Though she was trembling, Anemone took an oil lamp from the hall table and holding it high, walked up the stairs. The father and son followed with their wounded kinsman, and Mrs. Breckenridge brought up the rear. As she went up the stairs, she stopped and looked back. There were still some four men left in the hall. She did not recognize them, and did not know whether they were Mornes or temporary allies.

"Abner," she said, pausing, "how about the others?"

"They've got the whiskey," said her brother with a harsh laugh. "They'll do well enough till Lancer and I get downstairs."

"And that," said Lancer, quickly, "will be at once, Aunt Sally." His eyes reassured her. 'We'll have to be out of this neighborhood in fifteen minutes."

Upstairs in Mrs. Breckenridge's immaculate guest chamber, Fisher Morne was laid in the fresh bed, and the two women ministered to him. The clock pointed to barely nine when Lancer said:

"We ought to be moving, dad. They'll have help from Carkham in two hours."

Mrs. Breckenridge began to breathe more freely, but the events of the night were not yet over.

A clear, low whistle sounded outside in the bars of a song once popular for a space.

"Waiting,—only waiting." Anemone started, for she knew it well. Though there was no signal between Luke Ellsworth and herself, he had a way of whistling that, especially when he called late in the evening, and wanted to ascertain whether or not the Breckenridge ladies were still up. The young Deputy Sheriff had probably come up to see that they had not been alarmed by the recent excitement.

"Who is it?" muttered Abner Morne.

"The Deputy Sheriff!" gasped Mrs. Breckenridge. "He'll expect us to let him in."

"If he finds dad here,—" said Lancer, low and fiercely.

Before he could finish, Anemone had sprung to the window and called from it without a tremble in her clear voice:

"Is that you, Luke? Thank you for coming up. Cousin Sally and I are all right. We're just going to bed."

"Hello, Anemone," came the man's voice in rather surprised accents. "Couldn't see at first where you were speaking from. I thought you slept in the other side of the house."

"It—it's cooler here," faltered Anemone bravely.

"I hope you didn't have a bad time down at the jail, Luke?"

"About as bad as we could," said the Deputy Sheriff rather bitterly. "We lost our man! And Anemone,—I want to come in to speak to your cousin and you. May I?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEPUTY SHERIFF PAYS A CALL.

ANEMONE stood speechless for a moment. Then she called, haltingly, "All right. I—I'll come down and speak to you. Go to the kitchen door, Luke. Wakeman's got a new bolt on the front door and—and I don't know how to work it."

She was trembling all over as she turned to face them.

"Good for you!" growled Abner Morne. "Sally, I said the girl had stuff in her. Is the kitchen door open?"

Anemone shook her head.

"Then we can wait," said Morne.

Lancer had been examining his revolver, and now came across the room briskly.

"All right, dad?"

The older Morne nodded at once.

"Is your arm dressed, boy?" he said.

Anemone felt herself start. He was wounded then, and she had not known! But Lancer shook his head impatiently.

"I want no dressing," he declared shortly, then suddenly saw the girl at his elbow. She had caught

up a basin and was looking at him with a sort of startled eagerness in her eyes.

"Please,—let me see your arm," she said with a catch in her throat.

Lancer smiled at her.

"There's nothing wrong with it," he said. "There's nothing wrong with me at all—nor with anything in the world, at this moment! I—"

He paused an instant, then went quickly from the room with his father.

Mrs. Breckenridge wiped her face slowly with her handkerchief. Neither woman spoke, but both followed quietly to the head of the stairs. In a moment the front door had closed very softly, and Anemone, without waiting for a word from her cousin, sped down to let Ellsworth in by the kitchen.

In a moment the Deputy Sheriff was in the parlor with them, and Anemone was shivering with the discovery that her white dress was stained with Fisher Morne's blood. She sat down out of the light, and hid the red spot with her hand, while Mrs. Breckenridge calmly welcomed the young man, and asked questions about the disturbance at the jail that night.

Ellsworth was unusually pale for him, and seemed upset. He looked at Anemone with more open solicitude than he had ever permitted himself before. In his honest eyes was something of yearning tenderness, the tenderness which is concerned anxiously for the beloved one, and deeply moved to protect and shield.

"Why, think of it," he exclaimed to Mrs. Brecken-

ridge, "some of those wild fellows might have come up here and frightened Anemone!"

Mrs. Breckenridge dimly pitied him,—as far as she could feel for any outsider tonight. But Anemone felt her heart grow hard.

"I can imagine," she remarked with surprising spirit and unheard-of sarcasm, "things even worse than that!"

Both her cousin and the young Sheriff looked at her in open astonishment. In all Anemone's gentle girlhood they had never caught that note in her voice before. She, with an odd little twist of her mouth, looked back rather defiantly. She was chiefly concerned in keeping her hand over the blood-stain on her white dress, and in listening for the back door to close. It seemed to her in her new readjustment of values that Ellsworth's worry over her being frightened was rather childish and absurd. On her pale little face settled a faint chill of scorn.

As no one spoke in answer to her last ironic remark, she added, brusquely, "I don't see how you managed to let them all get away, anyhow!"

"There were more of them than of us," said Luke Ellsworth, rather meekly.

"More of one family than of a whole county of men?" snapped Anemone. "I thought you were all prepared for—the Mornes. Why didn't you get enough men?"

"You don't understand, Anemone," said the young man patiently. "There were men enough on our side, but not picked men; you can't defend law

and order with a mob. They broke at the first rush!"

"And are the Mornes picked men?" said Anemone, the light of battle in her eyes. She could not imagine what made her say these things; she was nearly as amazed at herself as the others were.

"Anemone, what do you mean?" Mrs. Breckenridge asked almost defiantly. "You talk as though you thought Luke and his friends were to blame in letting—"

"Anemone's right," said Luke Ellsworth. "It sounds pretty feeble. As a matter of fact, Anemone, the Mornes *are* picked men,—trained from childhood to fight. They shoot straight because they've been taught to shoot from the time they could hold a gun at all. Their raids have nearly always been successful just because of that, their training, and their wonderful knack of hanging together,—and this time they had another big advantage; they had a man leading them who could have led a French revolution, I believe,—and handled it, too! He was a tall chap, quite young, and looked a better grade than most of the Mornes. You know, it was rather fine, the way he managed the thing. You couldn't help respecting the fellow's pluck and quickness. And those toughs worshipped him. 'Lancer,' they called him. 'There goes Lancer! Follow him, Mornes! Down-goes-the-jail!' It was pretty exciting for a minute or two," Elsworth laughed quietly. "We stuck it out as long as we could, but after a while the jail got—literally—too hot for us!"

He held up a strong hand with the back scorched into a raw blister. "The jail door," he remarked laconically. "It was right warm thereabouts.

"I must go!" he added. "I just wanted to satisfy myself that you were all right."

He went over to Anemone's chair, lifted the girl's small hand and kissed it reverently. For some insane chivalrous reason he chose this odd moment, in the older woman's presence, to plead his suit.

"Anemone," he said huskily, "your cousin knows right well how much I care for you. When there's trouble abroad I—I realize how I want to look out for you—and—be near you,—Anemone!" His voice pleaded for an answer, but Anemone, trembling violently from nervousness and fatigue, was not in a mood for sentiment. She drew her hand away, not too gently, and exclaimed:

"Oh, please, Luke,—I do wish you wouldn't. I'm so tired, and I want to go to bed."

Ellsworth turned from her quickly to hide the hurt in his eyes. Then he started. "Anemone!" he exclaimed. "What is that on your dress."

She and the dress were of an equal pallor as she answered:

"What?—oh, that blood! I was tying up Aunt Mallie's finger. She cut it this afternoon!" (To herself she was saying, "Liar! Liar! How can I lie like this? How have I even learned to lie like this?")

With a sick feeling she saw that Luke believed her utterly. His eyes softened with appreciation of her

sweet ministering ways. He knew she was fond of Aunt Mallie and charmingly good to her. But Anemone felt ill with guilt.

He was smiling pleasantly when he said goodnight to her from the door of the room.

Mrs. Breckenridge went with him through the kitchen and let him out. Then she shut and bolted the door and stood a moment leaning against it. From just upstairs came Aunt Mallie's voice, quavering and feeble:

"Ah's all packed up ready to move in case they's set fire to de house, Mis' Sally. Is de time come?"

"The time has come to go to sleep," said Mrs. Breckenridge, quietly. "Go to bed, Aunt Mallie."

She went back to the parlor and found one result of this night's work. Anemone had fainted dead away.

CHAPTER IX.

FISHER MORNE.

FISHER MORNE, their wounded charge, had, when he came to himself, an unprepossessing appearance. His eyes were small and shifting; with a degree more of intelligence, they would have been crafty; as it was they were simply sly and unpleasant. He had a loose, weak mouth; Anemone was glad when the coarse stubble of beard and mustache grew thick enough to hide its flaccid lines. He was ill-tempered and not too courageous about pain; the two women grew accustomed to bursts of profanity when they dressed his gun-shot wounds. Later, as he grew stronger, the reverse side of his metal showed, and Anemone found it worse than the first. It was an easy matter to ignore Fisher's oaths and complaints. It was less agreeable to catch his veiled look of insolent admiration, to hear his clumsy compliments and to be forced into a daily-growing consciousness that the man was strongly attracted to her.

Anemone, as has been seen, was very young, and utterly unawakened. If she had ever thought of a

lover, it had been in the most bloodless and ethereal manner known to dreaming girls.

The touch of good red earth in human love was far from her comprehension, and anything material was to her incongruous with sentiment. Luke Ellsworth had been too delicately chivalrous to shock her fragile little senses; Lancer Morne had the gay and picturesque quality which had dazzled her a bit, blinding her to deeper potentialities; it remained for this rude, and to her repulsive, man of the hills to really show her the rougher, less perfumed emotions of men for women.

Poor Fisher suffered the more from this fact; where another more mature woman would have simply recognized a primitive but sincere passion and refused it quietly, Anemone showed him a hundred times a day her disgust and indignation. If she touched his face accidentally in giving him food or medicine, and his eyes lighted with the contact, she would frown and draw away as though from some poisonous reptile. Once he kissed her wrist as she changed his pillow and she blanched with rage; helpless as he was, she nearly struck him then and there. And Fisher Morne being human, these things worked together in his brain to give to his feeling for her that touch of cruelty which in elemental passion becomes a sure result of repeated insult. A sort of deep secret anger began to ferment within him, and he promised himself that he would punish her one of these days for her fine-lady insolence and her unapproachable frigidity. But he loved her the more

stormily because of the very things in her that most infuriated him. For such is the way of man,—even of noble and high-souled man occasionally and how much more of such a poor specimen as Fisher Morne!

Anemone had experienced a profound revulsion of feeling from the mood of the night when the Mornes came to Rosvallon. Then she had felt exalted and excited, sporadically daring, and curiously in sympathy with their wild and violent ways. The morning after it, she had awakened to a sense of mental sickness and depression. It was as though she had been mad and was suddenly sane again. She looked at the feeble hulk that lay in the guest-chamber white bed, and felt a qualm of disgust at the blood she had to wash away from his head and shoulder. This was what outlawry came to, take it all in all; this torn flesh and flat weakness. The men shot and slashed and shouted and puffed out their chests and defied the law, and so on, and the women had to go about picking up the pieces. Anemone's lip curled at the idea. She was, she told herself, through with the Mornes and the adventurous untrammelled life for which they stood. Hereafter making *pot-pourri* would be exciting enough for her. For sentimental diversion she could always watch the moon rise—alone!

"You're too good for this sort of thing," the man said one day, as Anemone cleared the table beside his bed for the lunch Aunt Mallie had prepared.

Anemone raised her delicate black eyebrows. The man always aroused in her a feline cruelty. "Perhaps I am," she said, and dusted her fingers on her apron. The fingers were immaculate and the apron frivolously useless. The gesture merely expressed a dainty distaste for her occupation.

Fisher understood and grinned, though there was a flash of resentment in his small gray eyes.

"I reckon," he drawled, "you do think you're too good to wait on me! But that isn't what I meant."

"No?" said Anemone indifferently, as he paused.

"No. I meant you were too good to live in a little measly picayune place like this." His glance embraced the fresh and spacious room, all fragrant linen and quaint old-fashioned chintz. Anemone stared at him. Had it remained for a Morne to call Mrs. Breckenridge's comfortable and lovely old house "measly" or "picayune?" What on earth was the creature talking about?

Then she remembered her talk with Lancer, while the moon crept up beyond the pasture. "*You don't belong here.*" She hated her very memory for still holding the echo of that impudent voice. "*I shall come back for you one of these days.*"

Here was this—this creature putting the same thought into words. What had both men descried in her that seemed to them attuned to high, bleak places, and the room and breath of open space? She refused to recognize any such thing in herself. Was Lancer —was even Fisher,—clearer-eyed than she?

"Do you want coffee with your lunch?" she asked with no change of expression.

The faint color that came still with the memory of Lancer Morne had faded.

"Yes," said the patient rather sullenly. "But you-all don't make it fit to drink."

Anemone glared at him speechless, and departed.

She and Mrs. Breckenridge experienced a sense of relief that was so poignant it made them ache when Fisher Morne was able to sit up, and expressed himself as well enough to get back to his people. There had been during the ten days of his illness no word or sign from Eagle Mountain. The Mornes had apparently left him to the mercies of the Breckenridge ladies with no anxiety. Such was the way of the Mornes. They did their best for one another and then did not waste time fussing about it. Doubtless they had more important things to attend to. It was a busy season in moonshine and a year or two before some of the younger and bolder Mornes had branched out in even more questionable associations. Fisher, himself, had had visions of being a highly successful "road agent," backed and protected by the indomitable clan; who could tell whether the innovation of this educated upstart from college might not have stolen a march on him and invented some new and picturesque form of plundering during the dark time of inactivity? This possibility caused Fisher to chafe and toss, and he fell to exercising his hurt arm and

walking about a bit to test his head. The result was that when Mrs. Breckenridge came in with an egg-nogg for him one day he announced that he would go back to Eagle Mountain as soon as she could find him a horse.

Mrs. Breckenridge had no love for the fellow, but she was so pleased she nearly kissed him. She asked him if he was sure he was well enough to bear the ride, but Fisher, undeceived, grinned sardonically.

"I reckon you don't much care how I finish that ride so long as I start," he said sagely.

Mrs. Breckenridge was, after all, a Morne, so she did not deny it.

"I'm glad you got better," was all she said, and it was entirely sincere.

"I believe you," said her patient. "It'd be right bad to have me die on your hands, wouldn't it?"

To this self-evident assertion, there seemed no answer, so Mrs. Breckenridge remarked that she would see about a horse and he would better start in the afternoon when it was cooler; then she left him.

"He's going!" she informed Anemone, meeting her on the stairs. "He is actually going!—oh, my child, how have we lived through it!—a creature like that in the house, day after day!" She shuddered.

"Let's see," said Anemone, who was feeling rather tired, "is he your sister's or your cousin's son?" And she went upstairs.

Mrs. Breckenridge looked after her in silence for a moment. At times it almost seemed as though Anemone was growing up.

That night Fisher Morne removed the burden of his malign presence from the house of Breckenridge, but not before he had left a parting promise, the sting of which was warranted to endure.

"You've been right kind to me," he said, with a sly glance from his small eyes. "So good that I reckon I'll have to be dropping in one of these days to pay my respects!"

He looked at Anemone boldly, and she felt another spasm of disgust. Did the man really think she would permit him to call on her?

"It is a long way to Eagle Mountain," she said icily. "I, for one, sha'n't expect you."

"No?" said Fisher Morne, with a dark flush of anger. "But then, folks get heaps of things they don't expect in this world." He stared at her gloweringly, and repeated, so slowly that it was almost a menace: "Heaps of things—they don't—expect!"

When he had gone, Anemone turned to her cousin with a flash of unwonted color in her face.

"Cousin Sally!" she exclaimed, "I don't think I've been very sympathetic to you about the Mornes. Sometimes I've acted as though I thought you ought to feel more loyal toward them. But I want to say now that I quite understand the way you feel. They're a horrible family, and I don't wonder you're ashamed of belonging to them. I hope," added Ane-

mone fervently, "that we need never either of us see a Morne again as long as we live!"

But Mrs. Breckenridge looked troubled.

"I have no such hope," she said. "You don't know the Mornes, Anemone,—you don't know the Mornes!"

CHAPTER X.

A THUNDERSTORM.

JULY came in with that breathless access of heat known only to the valleys enclosed by high mountains. The Breckenridge ladies lived a life of utter inanition, devoting their energies jointly and individually to keeping cool. The place was in a somnolent, almost a comotose state; only Aunt Mallie bloomed and beamed under the scorching heat. The African blood in her was cheered, not oppressed by high temperature, and she sang more loudly and lugubriously than ever, a sure sign with her of the blithest spirits. Wakeman, a half-white negro, who had long lived in the North and possessed few of the graces or virtues of either race, wilted like a transplanted weed, and Mallie jeered at him for a "no 'count nigger as mought as well be plain white trash!" She, between her darky chants, contrived to mix marvellous cold drinks and concoct summer delicacies to tempt the appetite,—delicacies which deserved the most high and lyric praise.

The end of the second week in which the thermometer had failed to drop below the ninety mark

in the twenty-four hours, Anemone rose up in desperation. A mutter of thunder was among the hills and the coming storm had charged the air with electricity. Mrs. Breckenridge had a bad, nervous headache, and Aunt Mallie, keyed up by the atmosphere, was shouting "Joshu' fit de battle of Jericho" in a minor roar that rivalled the thunder.

"If *I* stay here any longer," announced Anemone, "I'll take to worse than singing hymns, Cousin Sally! I'm going for a walk."

"A walk!" Mrs. Breckenridge nearly expired at the thought. "My child, you will die, or get sunstroke, or—"

"Sunstroke, Cousin Sally! When there isn't a sign of sun, and rain coming?"

"It's been coming for four days," interposed her cousin wearily.

"Well, this time it's here! Look at the clouds over the mountain! It'll be pouring inside half an hour."

"And you are anxious to be rained on?" said Mrs. Breckenridge, closing her eyes, and reaching once more for the menthol. "Please hand me the large fan before you go,—this one isn't big enough to be any good at all. And draw down the shade. I hope you don't faint or something while you are out. It's hotter to-day than it has been yet."

"It's always hottest," declared Anemone as she fetched the fan, "before the thunderstorm. Shall I tell Aunt Mallie to bring you up some iced tea?"

"No, thanks; I'm far beyond iced tea," said Mrs. Breckenridge.

The window-shade came down over the afternoon glare that shone without, and she settled herself with a sigh of relief among the lavender pillows which traditions of the South insisted would keep you cool even in July.

Anemone tiptoed out and got her hat, a big shady affair which was unusually becoming. Her gown was as pink as the roses just beginning to fade in the garden; the heat had faded her cheeks, too. Though she was always pale, she looked now as fragile as a spirit, and something,—again, by chance, the heat, —had made her gray eyes larger and more star-like than ever. Long afterwards, Anemone wondered why she went into the kitchen to say good-bye to Aunt Mallie before starting on that particular walk; it was quite out of her regular custom.

"I'm going out, Aunt Mallie," she said, poking her pretty dark head in at the door.

The huge old colored woman smiled at her, showing a bewildering whiteness of teeth.

"Lawd bless yo', honey!" she said heartily. "Lawd tek keer o' yo'!"

The Africans, like the animals, are very close to the earth, very close to nature in her strange and mysterious moods. Once in a while our over-civilized consciousness is shocked to amaze by some instance of prescience or instinct in the colored people. Did Aunt Mallie understand, at the back of her simple brain, why it was that she blessed the girl that day before she went out to walk?

Not a breath of air stirred through the valley as

Anemone stepped off the veranda onto the hot-smelling grass. Distilled by weeks of warmth, the earth gave out a heavy scent, sickly sweet and dizzying to the senses. Now and again the hills echoed dully to the ripples of low thunder breaking like waves as yet afar off. Once, and once only, a quiver of lightning ran along the dark crest of one of the ranges to be lost in the imperceptibly piling and thickening clouds. A flight of birds flew by heavily and hastily, swooping close to the ground. The locusts and grasshoppers were still. Nature waited for the storm, and, waiting, held her breath.

Anemone walked across the lawn down by the tangle of thickets and low trees where she had seen the moon rise a month ago, and then cut diagonally across the pasture into the wilder woods beyond,—the woods that ran straggling and deepening up the mountainside, in a fragrant wilderness of cool green. The way was rough and steadily became more so, but oddly enough, she welcomed the slight effort that was required, finding in it a sort of outlet for the nervous energy engendered by the approaching thunderstorm.

For one thing she was glad to be able to get away by herself for a while. Her affection for Mrs. Breckenridge, the woman who, though unrelated to her by blood, had yet taken her even as her own and cared for her during ten peaceful years, was absolutely wholehearted and sincere. Yet Anemone in common with all living things had in her the need for occasional solitude. The fact that she could

now feel and recognize this need showed in subtle and deep-reaching ways that the girl was growing up. The healthy young creature before it has in it the "itchings of maturity" does not want to flock by itself. It is frankly and charmingly gregarious, and can make a confidant of a street lamp or a lilac bush. The few rare and delightful, if irresponsible souls, who remain children for all time, carry this quality to their graves. They detest being left to their own devices; they rejoice in companionship, even companionship the most unworthy, and they find their own particular Purgatory in loneliness. Anemone, having of late a number of new things to ponder on and digest, longed for the luxury of solitude, and having gained it, found that her thoughts and retrospections raced as hard and thick as leaves in a hurricane.

It seemed to her as she tripped lightly upward through the deliciously smelling shady trees, that she was thinking of everything that there was to think of to-day. She began with her earliest impressions, and followed herself with a frank and egotistical joy in the process, through her girlhood up to the present time. She found the way a very simple and uneventful one to repass. Before she had come to live with her cousin's widow,—the prosperous and kindly woman who, left suddenly alone, had a womanly yearning for children about her,—there was little to remember of any sort; merely a rather poor and sordid home and an invalid father who was destined to die a few years after she had

come to Virginia and Mrs. Breckenridge. Then ten sweet meaningless years while she slowly shaped, body and soul, into a young girl. And now, swift as light, new dreams, and new conclusions, and new possibilities. . . . She did not as yet allow herself to think that this fresh aspect which the world had taken on had anything to do with the coming of the Mornes, or with her meeting with Lancer Morne himself. She only knew that she was—different.

She walked quickly in spite of the stifling heat, and penetrated farther and farther into the depths of the trees and vines and huge boulders that made up the mountain forest. As a rule she had contented herself with strolling through the outskirts at the lower edge of the woods; to-day, urged by some need of action and initiative, she mounted higher and higher, finding the way steep but exhilarating until a sudden blinding flash of lightning cut its way down to her through the interlacing leafy boughs, and recalled her, with a shock, to the fact that the storm was really upon her, and that she was a disconcerting distance from home.

She turned hastily to retrace her steps, looking up anxiously at the blackening sky. Already she saw that the clouds were moving swiftly in a scurry of tempestuous high winds, and through the woods came a low moaning wind, indescribably mournful and weird. Under it the leaves whitened strangely and here and there, far above her head, she could

see a branch bend slowly, yet violently down under an onrush of wind which as yet she could not feel.

It was very dark. Though it was barely four, if her watch had not played her false, it was hard to see her way now. Even in the valley the minutes just preceding a big storm were apt to be startlingly gloomy; here, hedged in by tall trees, and close upon the towering mountain's side, one could barely see one's hand before one. A curious, deep-seated panic began to stir in her, a sort of primal fear of the elements, such as one of the cave women might have felt when overtaken by storm while far from her sheltering rock cavern. For a moment she trembled with terror and in trying to make haste found herself stumbling at every step. A branch of wild roses, thorny and hard, swung sharply back against her face and she could have cried childishly with the sting of it. Once she nearly fell, tripped up by a stone hidden under low creepers, and time and again she tore her frock upon brambles and twigs. She was making haste too eagerly to go really at top speed, and in addition to everything else a sort of conviction was growing upon her that, thanks to the dimness and her foolish panic, she was rapidly losing her bearings. If she should really get lost—

Suddenly the storm broke upon her, and she crouched, blind with the uproar and the beating rain in her face, trying to get what shelter she

could from a low spreading oak-tree. All around and above the elements were holding Walpurgis, and her ears ached with the clamor as crash after crash, multiplied and magnified a hundredfold, reverberated mightily among the hills.

Even the oak-tree and the other close-growing trees could not protect her, and in three minutes she was wet to the skin. Her hat had fallen off long since; her hair, loosened by the branches through which she had struggled and then utterly blown down by the gale, hung wet and dishevelled about her neck; her face was as wet as a drenched flower. Sick with fear and wretchedness, she added her tears to the general wetness of things and cried like a baby huddled on the moss under the dripping oak.

And then her ears thrilled to the sound of steps coming nearer through the wood-way, heavy masculine steps, crushing twigs and dead leaves beneath them. She started up, her pale little face alight with eagerness and relief.

"Oh, who is it?" she called, tremulously. "Oh, won't you please help me to get back, whoever you are?"

A surprised ejaculation was growled out in response and the steps came on at a brisker gait.

"It isn't—! By the Lord Almighty, it is! Maybe the luck o' the Mornes don't hold?"

Triumph that was crass and uncontrolled rang in the words.

Anemone looked up,—and gasped, shrinking back against the trunk of the oak-tree.

For the man who stood before her in the rain, his evil and mocking smile lit up fantastically by the lightning, was—Fisher Morne!

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURED.

ANEMONE was utterly unstrung and screamed not once but several times till the man caught her arm roughly and forced a heavy hand over her mouth.

"Damn it!" he exclaimed harshly. "Don't yell like that! They'll hear you as far as Covington! It's lucky the storm makes such a racket!"

Anemone was struggling and sobbing hysterically. "I want them to—hear it—as far as Covington—I want them—to hear it everywhere!—let me go,—oh,—let me go, I tell you!"

She was gasping with panic and rage. Her tears poured down her cheeks; each tear felt hot as fire for her flesh was chilled through by the rain.

"Let you go? Not much!" Fisher Morne laughed coarsely. "I've been waiting for this for three weeks! You little devil, d'you think you can play it high and mighty over one of *us*? Not in a million years you can't! I made up my mind down there in the old lady's camp—" he gave a

backward nod toward the valley and Mrs. Breckenridge's distant rose gardens—"that I'd have you yet; and I've been hanging round here for a week past, waiting for a chance to nab you!"

He pulled her closer to him, and his weak, cruel face was near hers,—too near by half. Some intuition told her that he meant to be nearer still. . . . With her pulse bounding and every nerve crisping Anemone drew away as far as his tight hold would permit and a shuddering, choking sigh escaped her. Her eyes, grown abnormally big with terror, looked out from bluish circles and her face in contrast was of the color of death itself. In her every fibre instinct shrieked in protest at this moment. She craved shelter and protection with soul and nerves and body. The thing seemed monstrous, incredible; it held all the sick grotesqueness of a nightmare. How could it be that she, Anemone Breckenridge, should be in the power of a brute like this? The howling storm and the cold rain that lashed her seemed but a part of the impossible horror. . . . Suddenly she crumpled into a little heap of terror and exhaustion.

Fisher Morne smiled pleasantly enough. The collapse of women in times of stress did not upset him; quite the reverse indeed. They were the easier to carry.

Waiting for a lull in the storm he whistled a shrill and piercing call which was quickly answered. Two men strode dripping into the glade and both swore roundly when they saw the picture. They

were stocky, strong-shouldered fellows with necks like bulls. They obeyed Fisher Morne as though they were dogs used to obeying somebody or other!

"Lend a hand here," said Fisher, pointing to the heap of wet pink muslin at his feet. Without a question they splashed forward. Anemone who had fainted entirely by this time was mercifully spared the sight of their coarsely smiling faces as they picked her up, and waited for further orders.

"Get her up to where the horses are hitched," said Fisher Morne, much as he might have directed the loading of some cotton bales. "We want to make Eagle Mountain to-night, and we'll travel slow on account of her."

"So she's goin' to the mountains!" one of the men said grinning. "She sure is pretty, Fisher! Will she visit us long?"

"She's coming to stay," said Fisher Morne rather grimly, and, carrying Anemone's limp and unconscious body, they began the further ascent of the mountain behind them.

It must have been an hour after that the girl's senses began to drift back to her. She first became conscious of a jolting motion; then of a pervading dampness. The rain had stopped, but her drenched clothes clung to her like wet compresses. She was in a cramped, uncomfortable position, her head and neck ached violently, and every fresh jolt seemed to go through her from head to foot. She tried to

move her hands feebly, and found that her wrists were bound. . . . This recalled her more sharply to herself, and as she tried in vain to struggle upright, she discovered that she was tied to a horse's back,—her head roughly pillowed on the beast's neck and mane, and her feet hanging on each side of him. She had never ridden astride before; the position hurt her legs and jarred her frightfully; her back was very stiff from the long leaning forward. A smell of horse's hair and wet leather was in her nostrils. As she turned her head painfully, a fresh pure current of air met it, and she breathed it in thirstily, finding that her dim senses cleared marvellously with every inhalation.

The splosh, splosh of the horse's hoofs was the only sound she could hear; that and a creaking of saddles. How many were with her? She could not say, and fear kept her from advertising her return to consciousness. She lay still, her head on the horse's mane, breathing the clean, rain-washed wind and trying to collect her troubled senses. She ventured to open her eyes in a moment. No one was riding beside her, not at least on the side toward which she was looking. There was nothing to be seen but the green, wet, dense dark green, and tree-trunks half hidden by shrubbery and tangled vines. The tug at her wrists told her that the road was a steep incline; they were mounting steadily upward all the time. Deathly sick with

fatigue and terror, a thousand wild conjectures flitted fantastically through the girl's mind. Would any harm really come to her? Would the Mornes really dare that? She tried stealthily to free her hands. If she could only drop from the saddle and slip into the underbrush—it would be at least a chance. But she could not get her wrists loose, even had such a wild plan been practicable.

Once she heard Fisher Morne's voice, rough and low, giving some direction to one of the men. Once she heard someone laugh harshly as though at some rude joke. But no one came near her to find out whether she was dead or alive. The niceties of solicitude and sympathy were not included in the virtues of the Mornes.

After a time she dozed from sheer exhaustion, and when she once more opened her eyes, it was quite dark and the smell of the air was different. It was perceptibly cooler and had in it none of the soft aromatic wood scents. It was, though the valley-bred girl did not recognize it, the pure and magical breath of the hills.

The next moment it seemed to her there was a sound of voices, and a light flashed into her tired eyes.

Fisher Morne's rough and mocking voice sounded close in her ear.

"I hope you've had a pleasant ride, ma'am! We're there!"

"Where?" she managed to mutter with stiff lips.

"On Eagle Mountain," said Fisher. "This is where the Eagles live!"

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE EAGLE'S EYRIE.

In a minute she was untied and lifted from the horse's back, but her legs, cramped from the long strain of her uncomfortable position, doubled under her. She would have fallen if Fisher had not caught her, none too tenderly, on his arm.

His touch filled her with loathing, and she twisted away from him shuddering, catching at the stirrup to steady herself. The man laughed roughly, but for the moment made no further attempt to lay hands upon her.

"All right," he drawled. "Have it your own way. Anything to oblige a lady."

One of the other men laughed and said something in the slurred accent of the Virginian hills, an accent so strong as to make the speech practically unintelligible to Anemone. Its substance, however, was made plain by Fisher's response to it.

"Yes," he said, "she'll get used to me all right when she's tied up to me!"

Tied up! Did the creature seriously think she was going to marry him? Her brain burned at the thought, and sick, terrified and exhausted though

she was, a sort of fighting spirit of revolt rose in her. They had trapped her like an animal. Well, animals have sharp teeth, and, when they are cornered, can use them. Even quite timid and gentle wild things will bite when they are attacked. This desperate defiance charged Anemone's shaking limbs with a sort of feeble strength, and out of her white little face her great eyes stared wildly with a look that might be the courage of despair.

The light which had flared in her eyes when the horse stopped was from a torch made of a lighted pine branch. The flame leaped and guttered in the wildest wind Anemone had ever felt. A smoky smell came from the flame and mixed with the clean fresh savor of the night air. The men's figures looked dark and strange in this leaping and ruddy light. There were shadows everywhere, grotesque and black. The whole scene seemed as madly impossible as a dream. . . . In some old book Anemone had once seen a group done in silhouette,—all manner of absurd and goblin-like poses in black against the page,—the memory of it drifted back to her in the odd, sudden fashion of unimportant, half-forgotten impressions at big moments.

She became conscious of a steady, thunderous rushing noise. Involuntarily she turned her head to listen.

"What was that?" she muttered stupidly,—they were the first words that crossed her lips.

"The wind," said Fisher Morne.

The wind! The thing seemed impossible. That

great sound the wind? Then she remembered with a shock and a shiver that she was on a mountain-top—Eagle Mountain, the highest and bleakest point for fifty miles around. At the same moment she realized she was cold,—chilled through and through. The stifling heat of Rosvallon seemed like a far-away memory. It seemed incredible that but a few hours had carried her from fragrant rose gardens and sultry airs to this high chill place among the winds.

The very cold which she felt helped to rouse her dazed brain, and moving her head painfully, for her neck and shoulders were still stiff and aching, she looked around her.

They were in front of a low building of some sort, through the open door of which glowed a red and intermittent light, evidently that of a fire. The clearing in front of the house stretched in a downward slope, behind them, and was lost in the darkness. Back of the house rose a huge jagged rock wall, crumbling down on one side into nothing, against a clear, star-filled sky, and rising on the other in a black crag, the summit of which Anemone could not reach with her tired eyes,—evidently the Eagle's Eyrie was built in a niche or ledge in the living rock of the mountain side. Though the light from the pine torch cheated her gaze and made it impossible to really see much of the scene about her, she had a distinct, if chiefly instinctive impression of something precipitous and vertiginous

in the situation, as though they were poised upon the edge of some vast abyss.

The man who held the torch spoke then, and the voice, harsh and deep, was vaguely familiar.

"How did you get her, Fisher?"

"Picked her up in the thunderstorm like a drowned kitten," said Anemone's captor with a rough laugh. "Stand aside, Uncle Abner, and I'll take her in and let her warm up a bit by the fire."

He took a step nearer as though to catch her arm, and Anemone, to escape, walked forward as quickly as her strength would let her toward the house.

"Aha! Perked up a mite at the idea of a fire!" mocked Fisher. "We'll give you a saucer of milk, Pussy, and butter your paws, and you'll settle down as pretty and nice as you please!"

Anemone stumbled at the door, but recovered herself and feeling as though a torture chamber was opening to receive her, she went into the house of the Mornes.

The room astonished her. It was widely but very solidly built of splendid timber, and the floor was made of large, flat stones that made no pretense at matching in shape nor size, nor at presenting a strictly level surface. The fireplace at the back, chimney and hearth, was also of stone, with a ragged sort of mantel over it on which were some knives and fishing tackle and a big package of tobacco. On the floor in front of the fire were

pegged out a couple of wildcat skins going through some sort of dyeing and curing, a big hunk of meat of some sort was suspended by a wire over the heart of the fire, evidently being subjected to much the same process. A number of rifles were stacked in a corner, and a man's leather belt with a holster and big revolver was dangling from an iron hook.

The furniture was of the most meagre description and had evidently been made by the Mornes themselves with but one idea,—that of usefulness. The table was a great slab of wood much thicker at one end than the other, supported by four slim round logs securely nailed at what passed for the four corners. The chairs were merely three-legged stools manufactured on the same simple lines.

The Mornes had no use for chairs with backs or arms. When they wanted to loll, they lay down at full length. On either side of the fireplace were heaps of thick gray blankets and some animal skins; these constituted the arm-chairs and divans of the establishment.

The room smelled chiefly of smoke, and it made Anemone cough and her eyes smart, whereat Abner Morne and Fisher laughed at her from the door.

"Where's Aunt Hagar?" said the younger man.

"In the cook-house," said Abner, "showing that good-for-nothing slut of a Myra how to cook supper. One of these days Hagar will whip her till she bleeds if she doesn't behave better!"

"She's a fine lass!" said Fisher, warmly. "Aunt

Hagar was a damned sight worse than she when she was young!"

His uncle laughed almost proudly. "That's no lie!" he said. "Sit down, girl!" he added to Anemone. "You're at home here. Sit down!"

Anemone was thankful to obey. She sank onto one of the comfortless little hard stools and stared straight in front of her. Her shoulders felt weighted down by something and she found that she was wearing a rubber poncho. She undid it and let it slip heavily to the floor. Then she sat frozen with misery and sickened by the wood smoke.

She heard outside the trampling of horses as the men led them to whatever served as a stable, and the echo of loud voices. And above all roared the wind unceasingly. Another sound drifted to her—that of angry feminine voices, one high and shrill, the other harsh and strident.

"Curse you!" the latter was shouting. "Curse you for a lazy, ill-tempered hussy! Take that!"

There was the noise of a vigorous ringing slap and a scream of anger or pain or both.

Anemone's very soul sank. What manner of place was this that she had been brought to? Were they all demons—men and women alike? Any hope that had lurked in her heart that she might find feminine help, protection or sympathy, died forthwith, killed by the savage voices from the other room.

Then she started violently. For she had heard

another voice,—one that she recognized, and that she despised herself for recognizing so immediately.

"What!" it cried just outside the door. "You don't say so!" A pause, and then, with a big, boisterous laugh: "I'd never have believed it of Fisher!"

The next moment Lancer Morne, followed by his father, came into the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EAGLE'S PREY.

In the time some subtle and striking change had come over Lancer. His skin was burnt a deeper copper, his hair was rough and too long for civilized standards, his clothes were of the coarsest description and weather-stained. The flannel shirt was open at the throat; the high boots were muddy, and these outward and visible signs of his reversion to the primitive were the least of the alterations in him. His vivid blue eyes had a fiercer light, his jaw looked more stubborn—more brutal, Anemone called it, shuddering. His mouth had somehow an indefinably relentless line, as though he had swept aside subterfuges and superficialities for all time. He looked to the girl's fastidious sight a hundredfold coarser, more cruel, and yet—handsomer than she had ever believed a mere human could be. That the boy had merely become a man, the eagle found his wings, she did not see—yet. It would require a woman's vision, not a girl's, to find resolution in the cruelty and a clean and primal strength in what seemed to her merely animalism.

Even less could she have been expected to understand his greeting of her,—a greeting flung out loud and exultantly:

"By all the gods of the mountains!—the wind flower has been transplanted at last!"

Anemone's gray eyes were nearly black as she looked at him.

"So you're in this, too!" she said, drawing in her breath till it hissed.

Old Abner Morne chuckled.

"That's all right!" he said. "I like to see a girl with spirit. New blood, Lancer," he added, more seriously. "The Mornes need it. Here's a fine little valley wife for Fisher, and a new sort of Morne woman to bear children to the pack!"

Anemone brought her little teeth together almost with a snap. She was, indeed, like a small, savage animal trapped and beset. She looked as unlike her girlish graceful self as could well be imagined, as she stood rigid by the table with those dark and wild gray eyes.

"New blood!" muttered old Abner again. "And good blood, too,—wild blood, even if it comes from the valley. In time she'll do for an eagle's mate. 'Twill take a bit of toughening, but she'll do!"

"Before I mate with any of your hideous eagle brood," cried Anemone, white and gasping, "I'll kill you all and myself too!"

Both Abner Morne and Lancer smiled, and the smile nearly drove her mad. Never had she felt so slight and impotent. These two horrible, mock-

ing, brutal men! She hated them both, but it seemed to her that she hated Lancer a thousand times more than his father. He was young, and his strength seemed an added insolence. She thirsted to have it out with him face to face,—and almost immediately her wish was granted.

A man outside shouted for Abner and he went, stumbling a little in the tricky firelight, to the door. In a moment he had vanished into the darkness and Anemone was left alone with Lancer.

She walked up to him deliberately.

"Are you going to help me to escape from this place?" she demanded, a spot in either cheek.

Lancer was silent as he looked at her. At last he said, "No."

She could hardly believe her ears.

"You are not!" she exclaimed.

"I am not."

Anemone began to tremble not so much with terror as excitement and rage.

"Why?" she said, with an edge in her voice.

"I don't think it's any use telling you," he returned quietly.

"Possibly," she said, scornfully, "my intelligence might be able to grasp it. Please try!"

"Because," said the man distinctly, "I don't want you to."

Anemone stared at him in a sort of wrathful horror. "You don't want me to get away?" she said in a shaking voice.

"Exactly," said Lancer Morne.

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He was leaning against the jagged stone mantel, and the fire played on his face, giving him, Anemone thought, a sinister and diabolical look. Standing at ease and watching her quietly, he seemed to her the most inflexible and unrelenting figure she had ever seen. But she was not afraid of him. To her astonishment she found she was not afraid of anything just at present. She felt almost beside herself with anger and fiercely anxious for battle. For the first time in her gentle life Anemone longed to scratch, bite, strike and wound. The physical lust for violence rose in her amazingly and she would have loved to lash this imperturbable man across the face. Failing this, she searched her blazing little head for worse, that should hurt as surely as a whip.

She drew one deep, hard breath and steadied herself with a hand on the rude table; then—

"What do you want me for?"

"What do you suppose?" said Lancer. For the first time a flicker of a smile crossed his face. A flash was in his eyes,—was it conceivably tenderness? Anemone preferred not to credit that possibility. The last flick of red fled from her cheeks as she answered him:

"Judging from my brief acquaintance with you, I should say you wanted me in order to make me suffer."

"Not entirely," said Lancer. Her scorn seemed to roll from him like raindrops from oilskin. His skin, she told herself furiously, was impervious to

insult. Nevertheless she went ahead desperately in her effort to puncture it.

"Then you planned this kidnapping expedition?" she said. "I might have known it was you."

"You do Fisher an injustice," said Lancer. "He is entirely responsible, I assure you."

"You expect me to believe," said Anemone, "that you knew nothing about it until you saw me here?"

"No; I don't expect you to believe it. But it is so just the same."

She laughed, and down in her soul lurked a shuddering surprise at herself, that she should be able to laugh, in a moment like this.

"I am glad you don't expect me to believe it," she said, contemptuously.

Lancer said nothing.

"If it is true—" she began after a second.

"You said you didn't believe it," interrupted the man.

Anemone clenched her small hands. "I say," she said in a low angry voice, "if it *is* true, why aren't you willing to help me now?"

"I am willing to help you."

"To get away?"

"No. I'll never help you to do that."

"There is no other way to help me," said Anemone.

"I think there is."

She abandoned that point in despair. "You

didn't plan to bring me, but now you want to keep me here!"

"That is it."

"Oh!" she exclaimed rather wildly, "I wish I could kill you! *Why* should you want to keep me since it was not your plan?"

"Because," said Lancer, "now that you are here —though I don't think I would have brought you quite as Fisher did,—I find that I can't face giving you up."

"You want me here for the same reason that your considerate and chivalrous father wants me, I suppose," she said, the color flaming back and dying almost as quickly as it had come, "to—what was the pretty phrase he used?—to give Fisher a valley wife, and—"

Lancer broke in, not quickly but firmly. "My father is used to frank speech. He does not see why the relations of men and women should not be talked of. No; that is not why I want you, Wind-Flower, and you know it; I want you for myself."

"So you want to appropriate the valley wife," blazed Anemone.

"I don't care," said Lancer, and for the first time his passion lit his face with a hotter flame than that of the fire. "I don't care whether you come from the valley, or from heaven, or from hell, but—I want you—I have wanted you ever since I saw you first when the moon was rising."

Suddenly he was close to her; it seemed as though

he had crossed the room in a step, his coming was so swift.

"I love you, and I want you!" he breathed as he faced her.

The Anemone of but a short time ago would have shrunk shuddering from the look in his eyes. Now it simply filled her with a fiercer rage.

"So you Mornes don't even stick to the code of honor among thieves!" she gasped. "Why, you are lower than savages. You want to steal me for yourself!"

"Steal?" Lancer's jaw grew hard. "No! I want to win you!"

Anemone laughed crazily.

"Win me? Is this your idea of a wooing? Or are you going to knock your cousin down with a club?"

"Very likely," said Lancer. His eyes still pierced hers, and that queer glow still lit his face. "You are not Fisher's wife yet. You are still free for the best man to win. Up here on Eagle Mountain we fight for our mates. If Fisher wants you he'll have to fight for you!"

"I hope and pray that he does," said Anemone, feeling actually sick with the extremity of her anger. "I loathe him as I loathe a snake, and if he marries me I think I shall kill him,—but I would rather be his wife than yours!"

Lancer smiled into her eyes and stooped suddenly closer. There was a second in which she stood

stunned and breathless. Then he kissed her on the lips. . . .

The kiss was to her like a bullet or a dagger. Madness filled her, brain, soul and blood. For one dreadful minute she seemed to grow blind and deaf and paralyzed. She shrieked a thin wild shriek of rage and struck him with all her strength across the mouth.

CHAPTER XIV.

MORNE WOMEN.

LANCER swore once, furiously, under his breath, and caught his lip in his teeth, staring at her with blazing eyes. For a second it seemed that he could not trust himself to speak.

Anemone, still panting and with her head refusing to clear, knew that he wanted to beat her.

"All right!" he said at last. "You want to fight, do you? I was going to handle you with gloves; I thought you were a civilized woman, you see, and might be shocked at our rude ways. But I guess you can give as good as you get!"

His speech was rough and a little hoarse as though he controlled himself with difficulty. There was, Anemone felt, an added insolence in his look. There was also a dull red streak across the lower part of his face which added to his rather sinister expression.

He put out one strong hand and took hold of Anemone's arm in a steel-like grip. She gave a low cry and shrank.

"You hurt me!" she gasped furiously.

He laughed contemptuously.

"You're a cry-baby after all!" he said rudely. "That slap you gave me was just babyish bad temper. I thought for a minute you were a real woman showing fight. Now see here,—" to Anemone's blank and breathless astonishment he gave her a shake,—quite a definite, teeth-rattling, nerve-jarring shake,—"I don't allow people to strike me. If a man did it I'd kill him."

"Why don't you kill me?" she flashed. "You're brute enough!"

He regarded her with a slow look which tingled through her.

"I'm a darned sight too much of a brute to kill you," he said, coolly. "I don't want you dead."

She looked at him with wide eyes. "You want to torture me by inches, I suppose?" she said with white sarcasm.

"Never mind what I want to do. Only don't strike me again, young lady. It isn't safe."

"Safe!" she defied him with white scorn, though his grip still bit into her arm. She hardly knew this hard-jawed man, so suddenly and strangely pale under his tan except for the red streak across his mouth. "Safe!" she mocked again.

With a smothered exclamation as though he put temptation fiercely from him, Lancer let her go, or rather, pushed her away. Then he faced her.

"If you ever strike me again," he said, "I swear that I will either kiss you to death or beat you. I'm not sure which."

"I prefer the beating," she said, looking like a small fury.

"I dare say!"

"You've given me a warning," said Anemone, nursing the arm he had bruised. "Now I'll give you one. If you ever kiss me again I'll kill you."

Lancer laughed angrily. "I guess we'll come pretty close to killing each other before we're through," he said abruptly, and swung out of the place without another word.

At the same moment while Anemone was still standing white and shaking in the middle of the room, a door at a farther end opened and two women came in. Both were tall and strong, but one of them was one of the most splendid-looking persons she had ever seen,—a woman nearly six feet in height, with snow-white hair and eyes as blazing blue as Lancer's own. She was dressed in a rough, gray woolen gown that left her strong brown throat bare, and her sleeves were rolled up from lean forearms as powerful as a man's. The other was a young, full-fleshed, dark-skinned girl with a sullen handsome face and some attempts at feminine finery,—a red ribbon in her black hair and a bow on the front of her calico dress.

"So you," said the white-haired woman, harshly, "are Fisher Morne's girl,—the child my sister has been nursing down there." Her large disdainful gesture indicated the valley and far-away Rosvallon.

"I am Anemone Breckenridge."

Both the other women laughed. "What a mouthful!" cried the dark girl shrilly. "So it's you he's taken up with, eh? Why I could eat you for supper!"

"And would like to, I reckon, Myra!" said the white-haired woman with a grim smile.

Myra Morne laughed and preened her coarse charms like a bird her feathers.

"And what," demanded white Anemone, standing very straight and very small, "are your names, if you please?"

"Myra Morne," said the girl, with a mincing curtsy. "Do teach me the fashions, your ladyship!" she laughed, loudly.

The older woman stopped her with a gesture.

"Shut up, Myra," she said. "You and your silly giggling ways make me sick. Do you want to be cuffed again?"

The girl subsided, scowling. The other turned once more to Anemone.

"I, young woman," she said, with an air of sincere and authentic majesty, "am Hagar Morne."

Such was Anemone's introduction to the terrible "old woman of Eagle Mountain." For so she was called,—though she was not old.

Hagar Morne was startlingly like Mrs. Breckenridge in feature, and as startlingly different in expression. Whereas the widow with whom Anemone

had spent her girlhood gave always an impression of instincts and attributes scrupulously and rigidly suppressed, the mountain woman struck one as a creature wholly ruled by her primitive impulses. She was strange, violent, rather magnificent in a savage way, like all of her stock. A barbaric joy in life looked out from under her shaggy brows, and though her hair was white and her face more heavily lined than Mrs. Breckenridge's, she suggested not age but unconquerable spiritual youth. There is something ironic, perhaps, in using the word "spiritual" in connection with Hagar Morne. She was a creature of the most elemental, not to say elementary passions, and probably if she ever thought of her immortal soul it was as so much dead wood to be carried around by her much more interesting body. She had borne three sons first and last and was, she boasted, a better man than any of them. The Mornes were far advanced on the Woman Question. Their women took the same chances, risks, privileges, and spoils as the men, and when a Morne daughter took a mate, she kept her own name and passed it on to her children. So it was that there was such a vast clan of them. Only the Morne women's male partners and few underlings that ran, jackal-like, behind the pack, kept any name save that which time and tradition had made terrible for many miles around Eagle Mountain.

Hagar was a widow twice over. First she had

married a fugitive horse-thief named Magraw, who had been shot one night by a Sheriff long afterwards. Two sons by him she had given to the clan, both bearing her name and not Magraw's, and both of them had died violent deaths. Then she had mated with her cousin, Abner Morne, the strongest man and consequently the leader of them all. Lancer was their one son, and now the woman was watching with fierce impatience for her boy to come into his natural place as the chieftain. Abner's approaching blindness enraged her; she could not forgive it. To her own standard of arrogant health, the one unpardonable crime was physical weakness of any sort. She had lost interest in her husband from the moment that he had ceased to be obeyed and feared as a god and a despot, and now all her hopes, furious, maternal yet untender hopes, were centered in Lancer Morne. It had been like a poisoned wound in her side that he had ever gone from the clan to college. She hated her sister for her defection, but most of all for having taken Lancer and educated him. Now her splendid lad had been given back to her. She was mad with pride in him and waited thirstily for him to prove his mettle and put his foot on the necks of the savage horde whose head he was foreordained to be.

As for this girl who was to marry Fisher, she looked at her with coldly scornful eyes. A civilized valley-bred jade brought up by Sally, the

renegade, and now come to join the brood of the eagles! Pah! What had Fisher seen in her?

"You are Cousin Sally's sister?" said Anemone, wondering.

"Ay," said the woman, with a short laugh. "Do we look alike, girl,—Sally and I?"

"Very much,—" said Anemone, hesitating. Immediately she added,—"No, not at all;—I don't really know," she ended up, in a puzzled way.

"Sally used to be a devil in her day," said Hagar, reminiscently. "Worse than I. But I suppose she's an out-and-out lady by this!" she spoke with a high scorn.

The girl Myra sneered: "They're a pair of fine ladies I reckon, afraid to dirty their fingers or tear their clothes!"

"Sally wasn't like that once," said Sally's sister, with a short laugh, "and this one won't be long. She'll learn our ways."

Myra chuckled as if she enjoyed the truth of this statement. She seemed actually to lick her full lips at the prospect of Anemone's learning the ways of the Mornes.

"Are you hungry, girl?" said Hagar Morne, abruptly. "Do you want some supper?"

"No," said Anemone coldly and defiantly. But in her heart she knew she lied. She was faint and ill with hunger.

Hagar shrugged carelessly and turned her back. Nothing further was said about her eating, but

the two mountain women now proceeded to bring in the evening meal and put it on the table.

"Move out of the way," said Myra curtly to Anemone, and gave her a rude shove.

The slight, pale girl turned on her, rigid and blazing.

"Please don't do that!" she said, sharply.

"Do what?" asked Myra, but her malicious grin showed how fully she understood, whatever she might pretend.

"Don't push me like that," said Anemone looking at her squarely.

The Morne girl's swarthy face flushed a trifle.

"Why, you little upstart, what do you mean?" she demanded, her voice shrilling unpleasantly. "How dare you put on airs round here, just because you are Fisher's new girl? You're no better than I am,—you're nothing but a—"

"Shut your mouth!" ordered Hagar Morne. "I'll have no vile talk here from you or anyone else."

"No, that you won't," retorted Myra impudently, "because you want to do it all yourself!"

Hagar swung back with flashing eyes and struck Myra on the side of the head, a blow that sent the younger woman staggering half across the room. When she recovered herself she sat down on a stool with her hand held against her head and began to cry loudly. Hagar, however, had time neither for compunction nor commiseration.

"Get up!" she commanded, "and bring in the pot of stew!"

"My head hurts," blubbered the girl.

"It'll hurt worse in a minute if you don't get about your work," said the white-haired woman, grimly.

Myra got up, snivelling and darting malevolent and resentful glances in Hagar's direction, and shuffled out of the door. In a minute she came back lugging a monstrous iron pot, so heavy that her muscles were corded and her face wet with sweat from the effort of carrying it. She set this down with a big thump upon the table, and some of the hot and smoking liquid within splashed out over her hand. She gave a scream and began sucking the scalded place.

"You careless trollop!" cried Hagar Morne, advancing with lifted hand. "Spill the stew all over, would you!" Before she could strike the girl, Myra had seized a tin cup from the table and fired it full at her. The sharp edge struck Hagar in the temple and a spout of blood dyed the white hair scarlet. With a snarl of rage the woman sprang for her assailant, and, sick to the soul with the horror of the whole violent and bestial scene, Anemone closed her eyes. The sound of blows, shrieks and curses brought some of the men into the room and the two women were dragged apart. Myra, struggling and sobbing hysterically, was thrown into one of the inner rooms and the door shut and barred, and Hagar Morne wiped the blood

from her face and fetching a stone demijohn, poured herself a stiff drink of liquor.

"Supper's ready," she said laconically. "I'll kill that girl one of these days."

On the table was an abundance of food, coarse, but giving out a wonderful odor of game, bacon, and coffee. The Mornes gathered around with much loud talk and laughter; the big stone demijohn was passed around the table steadily. It never seemed to stand unused on the table. Someone piled some more wood on the fire and the glare, ruddy and warm, illuminated the room amply, without further lights.

"Do you want some supper?" said Lancer, suddenly standing before Anemone. He held a tin plate in his hand heaped with steaming stew.

"I am not hungry," said Anemone obstinately, though she felt absolutely sick with hunger as she smelled the food. She knew that she *must* have taken it if anyone else had offered, but she could not bring herself to accept that or anything else from him. Nevertheless she was furious to find that he had not the slightest inclination to press her.

"Oh, all right," he said carelessly and stalked back to the table where he was soon eating and drinking with as much zest as any of them. Tears of weakness, hunger and bad temper rose in Anemone's eyes. She was feeling inexpressibly sorry for herself.

Small time was vouchsafed her, however, for this indulgence. Fisher, at whose tin cup the demi-john had stopped a good many times, rose unsteadily and shouted in a thick voice:

"I want to drink a toast, boys! Here's to my girl,—Anemone!—Anemone Morne!"

CHAPTER XV.

COURTSHIP ON EAGLE MOUNTAIN.

ANEMONE sprang to her feet, discomfort and all minor distresses forgotten in an overwhelming indignation. But before she could cry out in protest, Lancer, too, had risen and quite quietly he said:

"Let us drink to Anemone Morne who will be. But she's not your wife yet, Fisher."

Fisher laughed, drunkenly.

"What's a little matter like that between loving hearts?" he cried in maudlin mockery. "The Mornes have never been particular about the 'how' of it, when they took their women. I guess she's wife enough as she is,—or as she will be! To Anemone,—my girl."

Again he laughed and reached for the demijohn. Anemone was too innocent to fully understand, but something her instinct understood, and it drove the blood to her heart. In a vague and shocked way she realized that this horrible man was proposing to marry her in spite of herself. Clinging to the table, the sole support she could find human or inanimate on which to rest, she leaned forward

breathlessly. It was a curious result of these suddenly violent, chaotic events and crises that she was now living wholly in the minute as it fled luridly by. She had ceased to regret, to wonder, almost to fear. Every nerve in her was tensed with a primitive instinct for self-preservation.

The next instant something had happened; she hardly knew what, but there was a general movement about the big rough table,—two stools were overturned. The demijohn lay on the floor with a stream of liquor sending up an acrid odor of raw alcohol. The men had risen and drawn back, perfectly silent and watchful after the manner of male animals when two among them are at combat.

On opposite sides of the table Lancer and Fisher Morne stood looking at each other.

"Damn you, Lancer Morne!" gasped Fisher, suddenly almost sober. "How do you dare knock my drink out of my hand like that?"

"I'll have you nor no one else drink that toast!" said Lancer. The spirits that he had been drinking with the rest had mounted somewhat to his own brain. His color was high, and his eyes glittered with something more than their usual fire.

Fisher stared at him a moment, with narrowing eyes.

"What d'you mean by that?" he barked after a second.

"If you want her for your girl, Fisher," said Lancer, with indescribable insolence, "you'll have to take her!"

"Take her! You bet I'll take her!" The dark blood rose to Fisher's forehead, even, as it seemed, flushing his eyes.

"Will you?" Lancer laughed into his face. "You've not a chance, man!"

"Who'll stop me?" growled Fisher. His bloodshot gaze strayed to Anemone's tense little figure leaning forward in the firelight. "Who'll stop me?" he repeated while his face relaxed with passion.

"I will," said Lancer, and now there was no laughter in his voice or his look.

Fisher wheeled to glare at him, a puzzled frown gathering on his brow.

"What the devil d'you mean?" he demanded harshly.

"I want the girl myself," said Lancer briefly.

With a sort of roar of rage Fisher drew back with a raised pot.

"Hold on!" said Lancer, speaking quickly and rather sternly. "I'll fight you, Fisher, with all the pleasure in life. But as I don't believe either of us will feel much like talking when we're done,—" he smiled grimly,—"we might as well have our explanations first."

"Explanations—hell!" cried Fisher, breathing hard. "I don't want any explanations, and I've none to give you, you—"

He ended with a volley of furious invectives, which Lancer did not notice except for a slight tightening of the muscles of his jaw. He was evidently holding himself in leash by a violent effort until such time as

he should choose to let himself go. To the men who were already beginning to know and in a measure to fear him that rigid self-control boded small good to Fisher when the moment for action should come.

"It's like this," said Lancer, in a quick and dangerous tone. "I want the girl myself: I want to marry her, and I'm going to marry her. So do you. Well, here's your warning, Fisher—and dad and the others are right here listening to it. So you'd better not forget it to-morrow: I'll get her, by some means, unless you kill me, and you're entirely welcome to do that if you can. It's the best man, Fisher, that gets the girl, and don't say I didn't give you notice! Now I'll fight you if you like."

Fisher, panting and glowering, had stood watchfully as he spoke. Now with a snarl like an ugly dog, he suddenly lurched sideways and forward around the table, pulling his hand from where he had held it behind him. Something flashed in the hand,—a red gleam of fire-lit steel.

"Hello, careful there, Lancer!" sang out old Abner, whose trained instinct had followed the menace of the gesture, even though he was too blind to see the blade itself. One of the other men sprang forward, but stopped in his track as he saw Lancer's hand shoot out, seize the other man's lifted arm.

"You rat, drop it!" said Abner's son in a low and furious voice, and Fisher grunted with pain as the hunting knife was wrenched from his grip with a twist that nearly broke his arm.

The next moment the two men had come together

like two wild beasts, Fisher fighting desperately, with the venom of hate behind every blow, Lancer in a white rage of resentment, his face unrecognizable like that of an avenging devil.

Anemone had never seen men fight before. The idea of battling with the naked hands had always seemed to her vaguely repellent, a thing that decent people didn't do. She knew that gentlemen used to fight duels. She knew that prize-fighters held contests of strength and skill; she even knew that there were extreme cases where a well-bred man must resent an insult and chastise the offender. But this beast-like, primitive blood-lust was to her something as new and as unbelievable as it was shocking.

She shrank trembling, away into a far corner of the room, but, sick and horrified as she was, she could not tear her eyes from that hideous struggling group.

The men made horrible noises as they fought, gasping, almost grunting noises like animals. The glimpses of their faces showed white and wet and wild, with wet streaks of blood beneath their nostrils.

She found herself crying weakly with excitement and horror, and wailing over and over again, "Oh, won't someone stop them? Won't someone please stop them?"

"Quit your snivelling!" called Hagar Morne to her harshly, across the tense silence of the room—a silence broken only by those hoarse panting sounds.

The white-haired woman was leaning forward with her savage soul in her eyes, watching the struggle hungrily. When Lancer landed a good blow, a grin

of the most arrogant pride twisted her hard mouth.

The men all watched breathlessly. There was no thought of interference. Abner Morne would have knocked down any man who had taken a step forward. It was his son's quarrel; Lancer should have the right to fight to the death if he wanted to.

Suddenly Fisher, in whom the dying drink was reacting in waves of weakness, crumpled a little. He was breathing hard, with a whistling sound and his mouth hung half-open. The next instant Lancer had propelled all his anger into a crashing blow that sent his cousin to the floor. A sort of murmur went around the watching circle.

But the fight was not destined to end so uneventfully. Fisher, who seemed for a moment beaten, suddenly moved as he lay and, turning the pistol in his belt, fired from the floor straight at Lancer. The angle sent the bullet far afield and it ripped harmlessly through the canvas hanging at one of the windows. But the effect of the shot was indescribable. A storm of invectives, protests and threats rose from the men. Hagar like a white-haired Fury shrieked curses at the trick.

And Lancer apparently went mad. He dragged Fisher up from the floor by the collar and beat him until he slipped from his grasp, then dragged him up again and continued to thrash him. The thing became revolting, bestial. Fisher's face was a raw pulp; his legs refused to hold him. But it was not until he was entirely unconscious that Lancer ceased

his punishment. Like a bag of clothes he flung Fisher from him and the man fell heavily in a limp, unhuman heap.

Hagar raised a strident shout:

"I reckon," she cried brutally, "that Fisher has had enough this time! I reckon he's about satisfied, boy, that you're the best man!"

CHAPTER XVI.

STOWED AWAY.

"GET me a drink," said Lancer, briefly. "And see to him, somebody. He'll need some patching up."

He spoke quite without bitterness. As in most normal males, successful combat had entirely wiped out resentment. His feeling for Fisher, purged by the fire of conflict, was utterly impersonal. Panting heavily, he wiped the blood from his mouth, drank deeply from the cup of raw white spirits brought to him, and made a few casual suggestions for the treatment of Fisher's injuries.

Anemone sat in the dark corner, wide-eyed and appalled. Nobody paid the slightest attention to her until Hagar suddenly turned and said brusquely, "Abner, take that girl and stow her away somewhere. She'll be keeling over on our hands if you don't."

"The loft?" suggested Abner.

"As good as any place," said Hagar. "You, Abner, get some more wood. I've got to bank the fire for the night."

The old man went outside into the darkness.

In a moment Lancer turned and looked at Anemone and a grim smile appeared on his battered features.

"You've started in well for your first evening, Wind-Flower!" he said, with—was it possible?—a faint note of pity in his voice. "Don't have nightmares on account of this! You'll soon get to think nothing of these little family scraps!"

He was wiping a bloody right hand as he spoke and the men were carrying Fisher into another room! He went off leisurely to wash his face.

A little family scrap! Anemone turned away her eyes.

Abner came back dragging a ladder, uneven and like everything in the eyrie bearing the marks of being made at home. Clearly the Mornes were not mechanical geniuses; but it was characteristic of them that they would rather do their own work, and do it ill, than let outsiders do it for them superlatively well.

This ladder Abner tilted up till the farther end rested against the edge of a black aperture in the ceiling. Anemone's eyes followed the uneven rungs to this mysterious opening, and she realized this was the loft where she was to be "stowed away" for the night. It looked very dark and uninviting, but at least it was a place where one could stretch out at full length, cry if one wanted to, and be free from hideous and inhuman spectacles.

"Come along," said Abner not unkindly, and she

rose hastily. But weakness and nervousness had played havoc with her, and she was more helpless than she realized. Her knees trembled absurdly as she walked across the room, and when she started to mount the ladder, she found herself so dizzy that she could only close her eyes, and cling for a moment to one of the rungs before her.

The next moment two hands, strong and surprisingly gentle, grasped her waist.

"It's all right," said Lancer's voice cheerfully. "Just go up slowly, and I'll push you along. Keep your eyes shut if you like."

She shrank from the hands that held her, but she was too genuinely weak to protest and she began to climb blindly, supported, almost lifted by that close and sustaining clasp. When she got to the top, she dropped in a little heap on the floor. She found that her whole soul and strength were occupied for the moment in a determined effort not to cry. She did not know how long it was before a light appeared close to her. It was a lantern which Lancer had brought up and set down on the floor. By its rays she peered about and saw a large low airy attic close under a sloping roof. There was a window at one end without glass, and through it rushed a current of sweet, chilly night air. In the dim light and shadow of the place she saw Lancer busy with a pile of bedding in the corner. She felt a vague sense of resentment that he of all people should be attending to her wants to-night. It seemed an added indignity.

She did not know that it was Lancer who had quietly undertaken this instead of his mother, lest Hagar frighten or disturb the girl still more with her rough talk. When the skins and blankets were spread out to his liking, he came over and lifted Anemone gently in his arms. It annoyed her—so far as she had still vitality enough to be annoyed—to find such an extraordinary sense of rest in being carried like that, as if she were a weary little girl. He laid her down upon the soft couch he had made, and covered her with a fur rug. Then he looked at her almost wistfully for a moment, and went away.

Anemone lay, too tired to move, with closed eyes. In a minute Lancer was back again and set something down on the floor beside her.

"Will you eat something now?" he said softly.

Anemone shook her head. She would not speak to him.

Suddenly Lancer knelt down and bent over her.

"Poor little Wind-Flower!" he whispered caressingly. "You are tired and frightened and we seem horrible to you. But one of these days you're going to love this life,—rough, and wild and terrible as it seems,—and as it is, too! You're going to love the freedom of it, and the winds;—perhaps—even some day—you may come to love—me!"

He bent closer in the dim light. She saw his face, tenderer than she had ever seen it, just above hers.

"May I kiss you good-night?" he said.

Anemone flung herself sidewise with a twist of protest and defiance.

"*No!*" she cried sharply.

He rose without another word and left her. In a moment she knew by the scraping noise that the ladder had been drawn away. She was alone for the night.

Lancer had left the lantern and it made a patch of light in the darkness. The loft was full of shadows and faint murmuring noises; the smell of the wood smoke drifted up through the opening. Everything was quiet below. The Mornes, like all folk of the open, kept early hours. Everyone seemed to have gone to sleep. The wind spoke always in its deep voice, now moaning, now singing, now exhorting, now threatening. It was a strange and titanic lullaby that sounded around the Eagle's eyrie. It filled the loft with a thousand echoes and ghostly airs.

Outside a dog bayed deeply. So there were dogs there, too,—bloodhounds perhaps, to make her escape the harder. But even the thought of escape could not rouse her to-night. She was just dead tired,—and sleepy,—and—what else? She nearly cried outright with plain, undignified primitive hunger.

Then by the lantern light she saw what Lancer had left, a tin plate with stew and a hunk of corn bread. It was doubtless rather cold now, but

it was *food!* For almost a moment Anemone stood on her dignity, and resisted temptation, then she stretched out a trembling greedy hand for the plate!

CHAPTER XVII.

MORNING IN THE MOUNTAINS.

WHEN Anemone waked,—which was not for ten hours,—a broad beam of sunlight was burning in at the one window onto the wall at the opposite end, and the wind was more riotous than ever. A smell of bacon mingled with the wood smoke, a cheerful noise of excitedly barking dogs mingled with a low rumble of many masculine voices.

Morning had begun on Eagle Mountain, and to Anemone's disgust, she felt astonishingly well in spite of her ghastly experiences the night before. She knew that she ought to be wilted with hopelessness and fatigue, but she felt rested, fresh and hungrier than ever. Also, that perfectly irrational and inexplicable joy in life which appears to have nothing to do with happiness but to be independent of everything but chance, was in her that morning. The wind, clean-smelling as she had never imagined air could be, blew in and tumbled her hair where she lay. Another odor came to her,—that of coffee fresh made and comfortingly strong. She suddenly knew that she wanted coffee as she had never wanted anything before. With a normal instinct to go about obtain-

ing it, she sprang up and began to straighten her dishevelled hair.

Lancer had left a jug of water for her to drink. She now splashed it prodigally over her face and hands and marvelled at the temperature of it. The night must have been a cold one, though she, under her fur rug, had felt nothing of it.

When she was ready, she went to the square opening in the floor and tried to look down into the room below. All she could see, however, was an extreme end of the table with a heap of tin plates upon it. There was no ladder, and nobody in sight, and she scorned to shout. So she went over to the window to try to get some idea of what the surroundings of the Morne headquarters were like.

The window was small and set high up between the roof-slopes. There was the merest triangle of wall above it. Anemone, being a small person, could just comfortably see out of it. When she looked she was bewildered; it was as unbelievable as a dream. She rubbed her eyes, to banish the last phantasms that might be still clinging to them, born of her heavy sleep, and looked again.

Apparently she was gazing out upon a sea,—a fairy sea, pearl white and faintly flushed, here and there, with palest gold and rose. It was placid as a lake save at the base of two or three rocky islands where a curl of foam showed boiling,—delicately. The whole strange pale and gleaming expanse lay far beneath her and melted imperceptibly into the mists of the morning. Above her was a blue and cloudless

sky, burnished with sun and clear, high air. The whole effect was magical and lovely and incomparably mysterious. Craning her neck further, she looked straight downward. The sight made her head swim. Almost directly beneath the wall of the house dropped the precipice. The Eyrie was lodged on a dizzy crag, and below it was a great natural fortress stretching, sharp and merciless, into that misty sea. In the rocky crevices grew stunted trees, the dry, dwarfish growth of high altitudes, barren of green, sturdy of stem,—small, tough things that cling and thrive where they can contrive to find rooting-space in fissures of the stone.

Through Anemone's head drifted a phrase in one of her beloved poetry books:

"... Magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faëry lands forlorn."

Slowly the first startling, almost dazzling impression passed, and she realized that what she was beholding was a phenomenon of which she had often heard,—a phenomenon peculiar to mountain tops; the sea of clouds upon which the dwellers of the peaks can look down in the early morning hours. Soon the sun would draw away this ocean of mist, as the moon draws the tides of the real ocean, and there would be no more sea.

As she stood gazing out, spellbound, in spite of her sense of helpless resentment of her imprisonment, by the beauty of the spectacle, she heard the ladder be-

ing put up. She walked quickly over to the apperture with a beating heart, but it was not Lancer who stood below; instead, his mother's eagle eyes looked up at her from under the swirl of coarse white hair.

"You'd better come down and eat," she said shortly, but Anemone fancied that her tone was not quite so contemptuous as it had been the night before. She could not imagine what had caused the change, but hoped devoutly that it augured a better temper on Hagar's part and less danger of battles between her and the young woman Myra.

"I am quite ready," the girl said quietly, and rather timidly climbed down the ladder.

Hagar Morne stood and watched her with something remotely and stormily resembling a smile. There was a discolored spot on her temple where Myra's cup had hit the night before.

"You got down all right alone," said she. "Didn't need a man to drag you down, eh, as well as up?"

Anemone flushed. "I didn't want to be dragged up," she said.

"Pooh!" said the older woman. "You'd have dropped in your tracks if he hadn't. There's coffee in that pot. Help yourself."

Anemone began a hurried breakfast, feeling her healthy appetite depart under the sharp stare of Lancer Morne's mother. Suddenly she set down the tin cup, and raising appealing eyes to the woman's face, she said:

"Mrs. Morne,—will you tell me,—oh, please tell

me,—how long you—they—are going to keep me here?"

Hagar was silent for a minute, keeping that piercing glance upon the girl. Then she said, brusquely:

"You don't want to stay?"

"Want to!" Anemone's look of horror was answer enough.

"Aren't sweet on either of 'em, eh?" said Mrs. Morne, bluntly.

"I never want to see either of them again!" exclaimed Anemone a little wildly. She gulped down some coffee.

Hagar nodded slowly.

"There's no accounting for girls," she said. "They're the greatest fools that live. Rabbits are scholars to 'em. You've got the pick of two of the finest lads that go,—not that I think so much of Fisher, mind you, but he's better than any of your valley fools at that. You've only to lift your hand and have the two of 'em eating out of it, and you're a pasty-faced squealing chit, too. Devil knows what they either of 'em want of you. But that's neither here nor there. They *do* want you! Well,—Fisher doesn't count after this. Lancer's beat him in a fair fight, and you're his girl. If Fisher looks at you crooked *now*, Lancer'll kill him just as he would a wild cat,—and quite right, too. You're my boy's girl, and a darned lucky one. You can't do as well in the valley, girl. You'd better marry him peaceably and make him a decent wife. Eh?"

Evidently Hagar thought that she was being per-

suasive. But Anemone looked at her with returning terror.

"Marry him? I'll never, never, never marry him!" she exclaimed passionately.

"Humph!" grunted the mother, frowning. "Well, I wash my hands of it. I made up my mind that I'd have my say. Lancer wants you, and I thought I'd have my say, but he'll have to do his own talking after this. If you've any sense you'll give in quick. It comes easier sooner than later, but if you like to fight him all along the line,—why, do it your own way. Fighting is Lancer's long suit, and I reckon it would take more than a girl like you to beat him when he wants something!"

She smiled triumphantly. Somehow the mother's certainty in her son's unconquerable qualities filled Anemone with a stifling panic. She felt as though the walls were slowly but surely closing in upon her, and she sprang to her feet, pressing her hand against her throat as though she were suffocating.

"Cousin Sally will send and get me!" she cried in a strangled voice.

Sally's sister shrugged her shoulders. "Depends a lot on who she sends," she said, beginning to clear off the table.

"She'll send Luke Ellsworth," said Anemone defiantly. "At least she won't have to send him—he'll come!"

Her heart gave a grateful throb as she recalled Luke's fathful devotion. Then it sank again as she further recollected that it was Luke who had let the

Mornes take Abner out of jail. A good man and a brave, but neither resourceful nor of the stuff that attracts success.

"Who's he?" demanded Mrs. Morne, striding about the room with her free, man-like step.

"A Deputy Sheriff."

"Sheriff, eh?" she chuckled. "A Sheriff crazy after you, too! There ought to be some lively doings on Eagle Mountain."

The prospect really seemed to afford this extraordinary woman a genuine satisfaction. Anemone stared at her wonderingly. It was past her understanding that anyone should find in struggle and bloodshed the very breath of life. She turned, repelled, from the white-haired mountain woman.

"May I—may I go out?" she asked desperately.

"I don't reckon it makes much difference what you do," said Hagar Morne, and Anemone escaped from the room which she so bitterly detested into the glorious morning sunshine.

The sea of mist was breaking up now and rolling to right and left under the blinding shafts of the sun. A great column of steam-like cloud had caught the wild west wind and was hurtling and foaming like a tower of spray, upward and a little sideways, over the highest pinnacle of Eagle Mountain which, black and bleak, pierced the blue above the Eagle's Eyrie.

The valley showed in patches of green between the breakers and whirlpools of vanishing vapor. Far, far below, Anemone caught a flashing glimpse of water running like a line of quicksilver between gold-green

meadow lands. Was that Blue-Pasture River, which ran the length of the valley?

Houses as tiny as ant-hills dotted the green here and there. The trees,—the wonderful rich valley trees which she knew to be splendid giants among their kind,—looked like the wee painted wooden yews that come with the Noah's Ark sets. Scraps of that remote, civilized valley world came in and out of view, like the turning leaves of a miniature picture book. How very, very far below it seemed, and how extraordinarily, ridiculously small!

On the one side the cliff dropped down sheer as a wall; on another it rose menacingly against the sky; on a third, the long slope, bare to the winds, and cut and roughened by the feet of men and horses for years past, slanted down to trees; first low gnarled trees of the evergreen variety, then more luxuriant and less hardy specimens; and finally the real woods.

This was the most hopeful direction and in a leisurely manner at first, then more and more quickly and with an even more furiously beating heart, she walked down the slope.

She reached the edge of dwarfed trees, and turned to look back. No one was following her. Thrilling with excitement, she hurried into the little grove and —nearly broke out crying. For at her feet yawned a ravine, a deep gulf torn in the mountain side and entirely invisible from the house. It was not wide across, but deep—ah, so horribly deep that merely to look into it made Anemone light-headed.

The last hope seemed to leave her, and she felt

cold and numb. There was no way that she could find out of the retreat of this savage who had kidnapped her. And who could ever climb to her rescue? Who would ever find the secret trails by which the Mornes approached their fastness? It seemed to her, in that moment of despair, that Nature had built an impregnable fortress wherein she was to be indefinitely a prisoner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NATURE'S FORTRESS.

She slowly retraced her steps, looking anxiously about her all the way, searching with eager eyes each inch of the slope, trying to find anything resembling a trail. There seemed to be nothing. The clearing below the Eyrie might as well have been the court-yard of a mediaeval castle surrounded by battlements.

Then—she saw something which sent her heart into her mouth with excitement. Immediately to the left of the house, as she noticed before, the rock wall rose to a high and distant point. That point seemed to grow out of a vast and chaotic mass of rock, stiff, turbulent and mammoth in its formation. There then must be the secret way,—through that stony mass. In another minute her eager eyes had spied it out, a narrow passageway in the rock like a doorway. It was not long; she could see light on the other end of it. Evidently the farther entrance gave on the mountain side. There, undoubtedly, was the trail of the Mornes. She paused, consumed with wonder at it that so miraculous a thing should be. No citadel built by human hands could ever be so inaccessible or

so secure. Even if the rock-door were besieged a man with a rifle could hold it indefinitely; for no two persons could come through abreast.

She had heard of these wonderful formations in the wilder Virginia hills, but she had never believed the tales. Now she saw the impossible thing before her eyes.

No wonder the Mornes had been unassailable for generations. No wonder they had no fear of attack, but rather welcomed it.

Approaching the rocky entrance, she found what she had already begun to suspect, that on either side of it was chained a bloodhound, lean and hungry-looking. One look at their savage red eyes would discourage anyone from trying to go through that doorway.

The great gaunt dogs looked at her suspiciously. Rather timidly Anemone spoke to them, but there was not a tail wag in response. They were of no gentler fibre than their masters, it seemed, and would not make friends with the alien prisoner. Stout chains attached to their collars, and stone dishes surrounded with the remains of bones showed that they were kept fastened up and even fed so.

"Poor beasts!" she muttered, half aloud. "Poor beasts! How hungry and grim they look! They'd both run away if they got a chance, I believe,—and I don't blame them a bit!"

"I bet you don't!" said Lancer's voice close beside her.

She turned, coloring hotly at the sound of it. Her

charming face was thunderous and sulky. Lancer looked gay and superbly handsome in spite of a bruise near his eye which was the only mark he carried of the fray. Though he smiled at her frankly, a smile full of the wholesome radiance of the morning, she refused to smile in return. She only marvelled that he should dare. And his blood was on her dress at that moment, too! She had discovered but a moment or two ago that when he grasped her waist he had left a bloody imprint.

"What way do you think you'll try first?" proceeded Lancer in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Way to do what?" She had to speak in spite of herself, but it was with about as bad a grace as could be.

"To run away."

She glanced at the sheer cliff near which they stood, and then behind her to the bare slope dipping downward to the timber line and the ravine. Then she looked at the watchful gaunt bloodhounds. Lancer's eyes followed her, and he was cruel enough to laugh a little. The look she flung him was fierce but icy cold like an angry little cat's.

"I suppose," she said in an expressionless voice, "that *that* would be the better way."

And she pointed toward the steep cliff which gave on nothingness. Then she deliberately turned her back and walked on. He did not follow her, but she felt through the back of her head that he was standing where she had left him and watching her as she went.

She paused a minute to look out over the valley, for now the mist had all burned away, the fairy sea had vanished. Bathed in sunlight, the lower country lay sleeping in the July heat of which there was here but a suggestion. The sun was hot, to be sure, but the wind was too fresh for one to feel more than comfortably warm. Yet down in Rosvallon the garden was dreaming in the morning languor! Down in Rosvallon!—a rush of tears blinded her for a moment. What was happening in Rosvallon? What was Cousin Sally doing? Poor Cousin Sally who must be torn by a thousand anxieties! Ah, the cruelty of these people to take her away from everyone who cared for her and wanted to protect her, and never to send a word of assurance as to her safety!

For the first time she thought of Mrs. Breckenridge's side of it. She, herself, after all, had shelter and food; she was not in bodily danger. But her cousin could not know that she had these things. Thinking of Mrs. Breckenridge, and not, for the moment, of her important little self, Anemone's soul grew up several inches.

After a minute or two she brushed away the tears resolutely. With a firmer line about her soft and pretty mouth, she began to inspect the general lay-out of the place. The house covered a large part of the clearing. Besides the main building there was a cook-house, a wood-shed, and a rough shelter for the horses; also a mysterious locked building which, as she rightly guessed, contained the whiskey-stills.

Primitive, rude as everything was, it was built solidly and for the highest practicable degree of comfort and protection from the weather. The rocky doorway of Nature's cutting was almost directly back of the cook-house. As Lancer had now disappeared, probably through that self-same entrance, Anemone went back to her investigation of it. The dogs both growled as she appeared.

"I must get away!" said Anemone to herself, but this time she did not speak aloud. "I must get away!" she repeated desperately inside her brain, and she clenched her fists with the violence of the determination.

"Hello!" said a voice close beside her.

Anemone turned quickly. It was the girl Myra who had spoken to her. She sat on a stone at the back of the cook-house, with the raw and repulsive carcass of a deer before her. She was cutting it up with clumsy, heavy strokes, pausing now and then to wipe the knife on her dirty brown apron.

Anemone shrank from the sight of the bloody meat, but realized that this was not a moment when she could afford to be fastidiously minded. An idea had struck her at sight of Myra's coarsely good-looking face,—an idea big with potentialities.

"Listen to me, please," she said, abruptly and a little breathlessly,—if these people liked getting to the point, they should have it. "You don't want me here, do you?"

"To take Fisher away from me?" said Myra promptly. "I reckon I don't!"

"Then help me to get away!" said Anemone, her heart thumping as it had never thumped before.

The mountain woman paused to stare at her, her blood-stained knife poised in the air above the carcass. Then a gleam shot into her black eyes.

"Sure I will!" she said.

CHAPTER XIX.

GOING FISHING.

ANEMONE sat on the step of the Eagle's House and gazed dreamily out over the piled purple mountains that lay in waves and layers all the way to the horizon. There was no vestige of mist-stuff now, and in the warm sun you could see the Blue Ridge plainly, and, between, all the lesser though splendid hills softened by distance and the shadows of the few high clouds that sailed through the night sky. The magic of the mountains was entering slowly and subtly into Anemone's soul. So had she been changed in there that she actually felt that, since she was going to leave it all so soon, she was almost glad that she had been able to see a sight like this.

As she sat there she began to sing under her breath, after her old habit. It was impossible for her not to sing if she was at all happy, or at all moved. For some reason a small mocking sprite in her head recalled to her unheeding lips the foolish little song she had made in the garden of Rosvallon: "Where shall you find the butterfly's mate?" She sang it idly, careless of the words, until she came to

the second stanza. That, too, she commenced indifferently, absently:

"Where shall you find the eagle's mate?
Up in the air so high;
Up in the hills where the thunderbolts wait,—
There you shall find the eagle's mate,
Up by the windy sky."

Suddenly and for the first time the words struck her like a blow, and she flushed,—so it seemed to her,—from head to foot. The eagle's mate! And here she was among the eagles, up by the windy sky.

She looked up at the racing clouds, and felt the breath of the hills in her face. What fatality had made her think of a song like that? . . .

It was the afternoon of her third day among the eagles. Time had, so far, passed uneventfully enough. There was something queer and disconcerting to Anemone, in the almost domestic atmosphere of the Eyrie. Hagar and Myra had been busy part of the morning putting a portion of the deer meat on to boil for broth, and hanging the rest. There had been corn-bread to make by the panful, for the mountaineers were huge eaters, and a full twenty ate three times a day at Hagar's table. Some of the gang lived outside the rock-and-precipice-enclosed clearing,—in shacks and huts scattered about the lower mountainside, but the greater number bunked in Abner Morne's building, or at least came there for meals. This was the castle of the clan. Here the

loyal members of it were entitled, by an almost feudal custom long established, to shelter and food at any time.

Abner's whiskey business, nefarious though it was, brought him in a fair income,—more, in fact, than any one guessed. He had a couple of bags full of money salted away somewhere about the place, but he trusted no one with the secret of its hiding place. With small sums of it he or his emissaries went down into the valley from time to time and swaggered into village shops to buy what staples were needed for the provender of his men and beasts. These expeditions amused the Mornes. Sometimes they turned them into marauding exploits, not because they did not care to spend money, but because there was more excitement in making a raid on a store than entering it peaceably for purposes of barter.

Those first days had been surprising ones to Anemone. She had started with a vague impression that these mountain robbers lived actually like the eagles, and had no need for domestic ministrations. These homely preparations of food, incongruous as they seemed, made the place somehow less terrifying and unique. Here, as in Rosvallon, one cooked and scrubbed, fetched water, and tended the sick. Fisher, by the bye, was still prostrate, but she heard his voice cursing low and hoarsely once or twice and gathered that he was not entirely dead.

Hagar, who had no love for her nephew, yet did have a sense of stern duty toward any of the pack that might be ill or wounded, had looked out for him

with grim scrupulousness. She was a famous nurse and doctor, though not a particularly tender one, and could concoct a variety of powerful and efficacious medicines from herbs and roots like any witch-woman of old.

After agreeing to help Anemone to get away, the girl Myra refused to talk further with her. Doubtless she was afraid that they would be overheard, but at any rate she avoided the guest,—or rather prisoner,—all the morning. At the midday meal, however, when she went out with a cow-horn to call the men up to be fed, she paused close to Anemone long enough to mutter: "I'll do it to-night!"

Then she raised the horn to her lips, filled her deep chest, and sent out a lusty, if somewhat raucous blast that woke a hundred echoes.

The meal was heavy, coarse and smoking hot. Anemone would once have shrunk from it in disgust, but the mountain air gave her an appetite which demanded substantial satisfaction. Unappetizing as the stuff was, she had sense enough to know that in this high windy place where every breath seemed to send the blood tingling from head to foot, there would have been small comfort in a croquette and a salad!

Her appetite was further sharpened by her returned spirits. The thought that there was now a real chance of escape filled her wth radiant excitement. She could afford to smile even on these brutes about her, and she accordingly did, looking so enchanting as she did so that many ungentle hearts

softened a trifle. The men of the hills told each other that she was a "sweet, pretty kid anyhow."

Lancer was a little dazzled, and could hardly keep his eyes off her. But as she never looked toward him once, it is impossible to say whether or not she was conscious of the fact.

Now, as she sat gazing off into the purple distance, he came up to her and stood a second watching her before he spoke.

"If you were a real girl," said Lancer, smiling at her, "and not a very much injured young lady held prisoner by a flock of barbarians, I might ask you to go fishing with me!"

Anemone considered him gravely. With a little thrill of daring she thought: "Why not? It will be all over after to-night. I shall never see him again. Why should I not go fishing with him? I may be amused, and I might as well be amused for the little time I'm here."

So to Lancer's unbounded astonishment, she got up from the step, shook out her very bedraggled pink gown, and said with much simplicity:

"I will go fishing with you, if you like."

Lancer stared at her, nearly open-mouthed.

"You will!" he cried.

"If you didn't want me to go, why did you ask me?" said Anemone, purposely misunderstanding him.

A wonderfully sweet warm look flashed into his eyes.

"Want you!" he exclaimed. "Oh, you blessed child!"

He turned abruptly and strode off to get rods and tackle.

"Aren't you afraid I'll run away?" taunted Anemone as they set out together twenty minutes later.

He laughed gaily.

"Not a bit!" he said. "For some reason you've decided to be agreeable this afternoon, and you want to enjoy yourself. So you won't run away this particular time. Besides, you couldn't."

"Couldn't? Why not?"

"Because there isn't anywhere to run to where we're going. You'll see. And because I'm not going to let you!"

"But," she persisted, "I might slip off when you aren't looking!"

He shook his head, still laughing. "I shall be looking!" he declared.

"All the time?"

"All the time!"

"Won't you find it rather fatiguing," said Anemone demurely, "keeping such an awfully close watch?"

"I don't think so."

To her own discomfiture she found that she couldn't meet his eyes.

She was quite well worth looking at even in the crumpled pink dress. She had no hat, and her black hair was piled on top of her head. An unusual color

stained her cheeks and her eyes were bright and smiling.

"Oh, you lovely little woman!" cried Lancer's heart. "You headstrong, beautiful shrewish thing! If I could only tame you, and teach you, and make you love me!"

But he shut his lips firmly, lest he let fall a word to shatter the amazing sweetness of her mood.

So they went through the stone portal between the watchful dogs, who actually wagged their tails as Lancer passed them, and out onto the mountainside and the downward trail.

Anemone gasped at sight of the depth before her, but the view was even more beautiful and impressive than the one from the other side. The trail was the most precarious she had ever imagined. It struck down so steeply that it seemed impossible any horse could keep its footing upon it. Then it zigzagged in dizzy angles and was lost in the thickening green brush. Had she ever come up here, at night, on a horse's back?

Lancer smiled at her reassuringly.

"You're not afraid?" he said.

She shook her head.

"Follow me," he said, and if you feel yourself slipping put your hand on my shoulder."

"But suppose *you* slip?" she objected.

"I won't," said Lancer.

They started downward, he going before her.

"But surely," she gasped after a minute or two, "no horse could come here?"

"Not just here," he said. "We are taking a short cut between two grades of the trail. But some of our mountain ponies could tackle it, at that. I've put them up some pretty bad places when I was a lad up here."

Soon they left the steeper incline and struck aside into a sort of plateau jutting out from the mountain-side, and beyond this, passing through sparsely growing scrub-oak and laurel and flaming azaleas, reached a green and shadowed glade in a pocket between two hillocks. Here the trees moved softly under a sheltered wind, and the delicious noise of running water came to them.

In a moment they had come upon the mountain brook, clear brown and dappled with sunshine and blue shade. It sang a rollicking little song as it chuckled over its stones. At the edge of a deep dark pool Lancer paused, and took off his slouch hat to wipe his forehead.

"How do you like it?" he demanded.

"It's absolutely perfect," said Anemone, with a long sigh of content. She looked about her, entranced. It made no difference that this man was a Morne and a savage, she felt grateful to him in that moment. For she had never seen so lovely a spot in her life.

She sat down then and there on the ground and laid her hands palm downward on the moss to feel its cool softness. She loved the woods,—and these were such adorable woods!

Lancer had come to fish ostensibly, but he seemed

in no hurry to begin. He, too, flung himself down, but full length where he could watch the shadows play upon the girl's face, where,—if he liked,—he could put a stealthy hand out now and again and rest in on a fold of the pink dress.

Have you ever seen a slim yet stately lady, with blond braids and an alabaster skin, stand on a sudden against a purple hanging, with a gold vessel in her hands? When you caught sight of her so, you exclaimed to that inner part of you tuned to appreciate such coincidences,—"That is her setting. That is where she belongs,—by right, and for all time!"

Just so, certain men, masculine and a shade brutal, give you a mental vision of violent action: and when a chance street fight gives them to you, fairly in the picture, you recognize the setting as fitting, not to say foreordained.

On this most Arcadian and most exquisite background, Anemone,—the eternally, the immortally young and romanceful,—seemed for the first time to find the stage properties and quantities needful for her elusive loveliness. In the rose-garden of Mrs. Breckenridge's sleepy homestead in Rosvallon, she had been sweetly set and surrounded, and yet you still felt her to be a shade too wild, too poetic, too elusive to be in key. Here,—suddenly and mysteriously,—she was in her fitting and appropriate place. The heart of the greenwood was her birthright, and the magic thereof. Moss and little creeping vines were where her feet strayed naturally. She was at home in the dense, sweet-smelling wilderness, and a

delight and peace entered into her and filled her face with light and tenderness.

Her black hair was loosened by the wind,—Anemone's hair was always shaking its cloudy masses free from hairpins and combs and falling to her shoulders. It was not long hair, nor curly, in a strict manner of speaking. Rather it was the hair of romance and poetry,—thick and fluffy, with a crinkle in it as slight as the ruffled shadow on a breeze-kissed lake. Wonderful hair it was, the color of blackberries. There was no gleam in it, it was as soft and dense, as a shadow. Beneath it the big gray eyes dreamed inscrutably. The childish mouth, red and sweet, was curved with a little secret smile just now. It distracted Lancer. He wondered, even while he gave himself up to the mouth's enchantment, just why she smiled like that. This morning she had been mutinous, cold and angry. This afternoon she was all charm and graciousness.

The change was bewildering to a mere man,—and Lancer was very much a man. Though to his followers he seemed at times a little more than demi-god, and to Anemone's shocked girlish judgment, a little less than devil, he was in truth a very human creature, swayed by the same wayward human elements,—pride and cruelty and generosity and passion,—that sway lesser and greater men than he. He had his hours of power and his hours of weakness,—the more exaggerated in their extremes, perhaps, because lawlessness and wild blood are certain to magnify most mortal faults and many mortal virtues. At

times he could be preëminently brutal and take a piece of joy in being so: and again at other times he was a very child for simplicity of nature, ready to be led and cajoled and petted and scolded like any little boy.

It was in this mood that he said suddenly and with a certain humble whimsicality:

"Please, would you very much mind if I made love to you, Wind-Flower?"

CHAPTER XX.

GREENWOOD MAGIC.

ANEMONE stared at him in a surprise which looked, at least, cool and genuine.

"No," she said without any animosity, and Lancer sighed.

"Of course I knew you would say that," he remarked plaintively. "My mistake."

"It is always," averred Anemone with a judicial air, "a mistake to propose anything that you know is impracticable."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed he with a flash. "If people never proposed anything impracticable no one would ever accomplish anything. No. . . . That wasn't my mistake."

"What then?" She seemed disposed to be indulgent.

"Asking you anything about it."

"Quite right," she approved. "You should never have asked anything so absurd."

"Wasn't it? I should have just gone ahead and done it without asking."

"Done what?"

"Made love to you of course."

Her lip curled a trifle disdainfully.

"It is just as well you did ask."

"Why?" he demanded, laughing at her. "Would the wrath of Pallas Athene have fallen upon me and turned me into a—a—what savage creature?"

"An eagle," she suggested, and felt disgusted with herself for having fallen in with his mood of raillery.

"An eagle,—excellent! Do you suppose Pallas would have transformed me into an eagle if I had dared—" he paused for a second,—"dared tell you for instance how altogether dear and desirable you look?"

Anemone frowned, but did not look at him. He raised his eyes to heaven and added defiantly, "I have done it! And the implacable goddess has not enchanted me yet!"

Anemone felt constrained to say something.

"That," she explained loftily, "is because you're an eagle already!"

"Thanks. There is a lot that's noble about eagles," said Lancer, unconscious that he was echoing the words of the Reverend little Mr. Hotchkiss.

Anemone did not feel like discussing this point. The memory of her own foolish song about eagles kept her mute. But as if he read her thoughts in some uncanny fashion of his own, Lancer went on:

"And the odd thing is that you like eagles yourself."

"I?" Anemone was frankly startled. She glanced at him. "I like eagles?"

"Yes. You sing songs about them,"

The blood flew to the girl's hair. Had he heard *that?* These mountaineers had steps like wildcats and could come and go unheard.

"It is a ridiculous song," she said stiffly.

"Of course. Why do you sing such ridiculous songs?"

"I didn't think what I was singing," she said in hasty self-defense. "I was thinking of other things."

"I see. It just sprang naturally out of your mood!"

His eyes, sparkling and full of mockery,—and something else,—made her uncomfortable. She moved restlessly, and pushed back her hair. It was growing hot in the little glade where the winds only came gently.

"Aren't you going to fish?" she demanded abruptly.

Lancer turned on his elbow and lazily surveyed the stream.

"Seems a pity," he said, "to disturb the fish."

"Or yourself."

"Quite so! . . . Wind-Flower, how many of you are there?"

"I'm not a botanist," the girl responded primly. "I'm sure I don't know how many kinds of wind-flowers there are."

He scorned to notice the subterfuge. His eyes were fixed on her, a close, meditative look that seemed trying to see more than was to be seen,—to strike

inward through delicate flesh and blood to living spirit.

"Sometimes a fairy lady," he mused, "just born out of the evening dew, and the light of the rising moon! . . . And again a steady little woman standing brave and ready in a white frock with a stain of blood upon it. . . . And then a vixen with eyes like coals, and a white face and a fighting temper;—and then—just a weary child with a longing to be taken care of,—and now—all of a sudden—a Girl, a Wonderful, real Girl with her hair down and a perfectly normal joy in the out-of-doors."

He put out his hand and stroked the pink gown. "Heaven knows," he proceeded, soft and caressingly, as though he talked with himself and none other, "how many more of her there are! I have only seen her those four times, and she has been different every single time!"

Anemone felt a little,—a very little,—offended at this impersonal manner of discussing her. "Perhaps there will be still more variations if you wait long enough," she suggested encouragingly. "You haven't seen her bored yet, you know."

"No," he said, smiling up at her, "and I never will. I'm never going to let her be bored when she is with me."

Anemone gasped at this sublime conceit.

"Really!" she ejaculated.

"A woman," declared Lancer, shying minute flat stones into the brook, "is never bored either when she is being kissed or being beaten."

Anemone flamed. "And you dare—" she began.

"Metaphorically, only," Lancer hastened to add, suppressing a smile. "Of course, if you are a very literal person, which I should never have suspected, I will adapt that and say, 'being made love to' and 'ordered about.' The principle is the same, but it sounds less—" he shied another pebble—"strenuous."

There was a complete silence between them for a moment. The brook, voluble and sympathetic, poured in a flood of eloquent appeal and interpretation to fill the pause; the breeze whispered a dozen melting arguments. Nature, incurably, indecorously given to the inflaming of young ardors, was absolutely laughing at them, so sure was she of her lure and her snare. And suddenly Anemone got frightened. She was not, explicitly, afraid of the man who lay so quietly beside her on the grass. In spite of the things in him which she had accounted "brutal," "barbaric," "savage," and other crude things, she knew,—or rather some part of her subconscious self knew,—that, beyond a certain point, she could trust him. Just what the point was she did not try to put into a concrete form. He might lose his head, but he was not dangerous, or untrustworthy. And yet—subtly she sensed another and a keener peril than that of disrespect or lack of chivalry;—a peril that came from herself rather than from him.

For the first time in her life Anemone was conscious, humanly conscious, of her own sex and just

what power it might have to move her in spite of reason or tradition. She knew that, in some obscure way, she was dropping the bars that stood between Lancer and herself. A sort of enervation of summer-born content filled her, and with it a soft exhilaration. The nearness of the man was—not unpleasant to her. The sound of his voice speaking of love fascinated her. The memory of the way he had fought for her the night before,—shorn now of its attendant horror of actual and visible shock,—thrilled her. Anemone was discovering the fearful and precarious triumph of being a woman, and a woman whom men desire.

Suppose—suppose she should actually be tempted to consent to this man's insane proposal of marriage? The very idea made her jump—why, she was going crazy herself to entertain such an idea, for the briefest moment!

Such a notion was the veriest madness. . . . And because she knew it was madness, and because her whole training and education and instinct revolted from such a proposition, Anemone felt more and more frightened. And more than ever she was thankful that Myra was going to help her to get away that very night.

She would not stay near Lancer again another day. She did not love him, of course,—she laughed at the thought. But in these remote hill-places, far removed from the restrictions, the standards and the

demands of civilization, a sort of enchantment fermented along with the white moonshine whiskey they secretly distilled. There was a spell about the isolation and the immunity from custom and law; there was Black Magic, she was sure, in this hushed sanctum of Nature where water, and winds and trees, and Mother Earth, all wove incantations to turn you into—anything and everything except yourself!

Acting on a hasty impulse, Anemone scrambled to her feet.

"I don't believe," she declared, breathlessly, "that I want to—fish—any more!"

Her laugh was just a little nervous. Lancer did not move, but lay recumbent, in an indolent graceful pose, gazing up at her, and smiling.

"Don't you like it here?" he demanded. "I do."

She could have slapped him.

"I'm tired of it!" she insisted. "Isn't there anything else to see?"

He laughed at that, and she almost laughed herself at the absurdity of the question. Anything else to see,—in a country where every turning brought one face to face with the world primeval in all its glorious aspects, unspoiled by man, and fresh from the hand of God! But she would not stay.

"I tell you," she said, impatiently, almost stamping her foot, "I want to go back."

Without a word Lancer rose and shook himself very much like a dog. There were some small dead leaves in his rough, coppery hair. Anemone experienced an inconsequent desire to pick them out. The idea made her face hot. She seemed to spend her time blushing to-day,—not gentle, pleasurable flushes, but the fiery waves that emanate from the volcanic, awakening consciousness. For it is a strange truth that a mortal may only lose self-consciousness and so become cosmic and divine, by first finding it and becoming human.

Lancer stood before her in the green, whispering glade, and his lips tightened with that little characteristic expression that appeared on his face when he was controlling himeslf. At last he said, gently:

"It is not such a bad destiny,—that of the eagle's mate!"

Anemone started and shrank, but he went quietly on:

"You've seen the worst of us, all at once, at the beginning,—and I'm not sorry. It will make it easier for you afterwards.". . . Afterwards! He did not know that she was going away that night! There would be no afterwards for them. The two would know each other no more. . . . But he was still speaking, and she listened with a curious attentiveness:

"Those rough men," he was saying, "have their

standards, their code. They are brave, and they are loyal. They love their women and fight for them. The women live lives of devotion and self-sacrifice, most of them. My mother walks miles through the snow in winter to take care of sick people below on the mountain. You will find all that out later. But the great thing is,—oh, my girl,—the one big thing that is here, among the hills, we can be true to ourselves. We can be as God made us, free from the little, hampering things. . . . Do you understand, or is it too soon? There are a few big things, dear,—love, hate, death, birth, pain, courage,—you in the valley mix them up with a lot of stuff that doesn't matter. Here on the mountain top we take them straight!"

There was another pregnant silence between them, and then Anemone flung out her hands with a little desperate gesture.

"Oh, let us go back—please let us go back!" she cried, with a catch in her throat, that was almost a sob.

Lancer bowed his head in silent assent. They turned to go. Only just before they left the enchanted, dream-haunted glade with its brook and whispering winds, he put his hand upon her arm. It was the first time that he had touched her that day, and the touch was a very light one.

"I knew," he said, smiling deep into her eyes, "that you would show me a new Anemone."

"And what is the new one?" she demanded valiantly, with a lifted chin.

"A woman," he said simply. "A woman, beginning to be afraid of herself."

They walked on in silence.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO GIRLS.

Dusk came in over the purple hills,—late dusk with that wild hint of mystery known only to the frequenters of the jumping-off places,—of the wild plains, and coasts, and mountain peaks,—everywhere, in fact, where the human eye and the far horizon meet squarely, with nothing in between. To your city folk and cave-dwellers,—not unlike inherently, take my word for it,—the great effects of light and darkness come filtered, as it were, by extraneous and intercepting matter,—buildings, smoke, and so on,—stuff made for the shelter and the suffocation of man. Even in the valleys, you only catch glimpses of the eternal glories over the shoulders of the crowding and superior mountains. You are always subservient and in abeyance, but let you once stand on cliffs that overhang the breakers; or in the amazing rich emptiness of the prairie, or on the heights where the clouds break and foam about you, and you are within hearing distance of the stars that sing together,—and you get a

moment's supreme understanding,—lamentably brief,—of what outer space and immortality may come to.

The evening meal was over,—always, as Anemone gathered, the heaviest and most riotous of the day. Drinking was not encouraged on Eagle Mountain until after the day's business had been attended to. But at supper all the men drank deeply.

Myra joined Anemone outside in the soft twilight, while the others still drank and laughed inside the house. The mist was crawling in between the mountains like a rising tide,—mystic, magical.

"No good till it's dark," she muttered, then went immediately on in a natural voice. "Reckon we seem pretty bad to you, eh?"

Anemone was anxious to placate her.

"You aren't as bad as I expected," she said, smiling.

"Honest? Gee! I reckon they must think we're wild beasts down in the valley, don't they?" She laughed, almost complacently, it seemed to Anemone.

"Tell me," the valley-bred girl said, rather abruptly, "what relation are you to the others? I mean, are you a Morne, too?"

Myra nodded. "We're all called Mornes," she said. "I don't reckon I've any regular right to it, but no more has plenty of the others. My father was a Morne, a cousin of old Abner's, but I don't expect he ever married my mother. We don't go in for marrying much on Eagle Mountain. We just take up with folks."

Anemone frowned in the dusk. Was it actually possible that such outrageously barbarous conditions could exist within riding distance of churches and magistrates?

"And you," she said, "you have never mar—I mean, 'taken up' with anyone?"

Myra stared at her, and laughed.

"I?" she said; "taken up with anyone?"

"I should have thought," continued Anemone innocently, "that you'd have had lots of the men in love with you,—for you're quite nice-looking, you know," she added rather shyly.

Indeed, in that softening light, Myra looked almost beautiful, in her buxom brunette fashion. Her rough brown hair, straight and coarse as that of an Indian squaw, hung in a long thick braid down her back. She often wore it so to save the bother of dressing, or because she was out of hairpins. Her eyes were pools of darkness. She stood with one hand resting on her full hip, in a strong and easy attitude. Although too heavily made, she had the natural freedom of movement of any healthy animal.

"Nice-looking, am I?" she laughed shortly. Anemone saw a sort of subdued flash in her sullen eyes as she stared out over the darkening hill-tops. "Maybe," she said heavily, "I am. Maybe I have had—some of 'em—in love with me."

"You aren't angry with me for saying that?" ventured Anemone, fearing that she had hurt her.

"Angry?" said the girl. She had a disconcerting habit of repeating a word, almost as if she did not fully understand it. Perhaps she did not; her brain was dull and primitive, obscured by animalism. It seemed, however, to be but waking now in rather a painful fashion. Suddenly she turned the wild and yet sulky dark eyes toward the other girl.

"Why, you baby," she exclaimed, "they called me 'the Mornes' Lass' last year!"

It was Anemone's turn to repeat, stupidly, "The Mornes' Lass!"

"Yes,—the girl all the Mornes were proud of. I'm the only girl in the clan now,—except Philla Morne who lives down the hill and has a bad knee so she can't come to the House. Besides she's religious."

"A Morne religious!"

"Yes,—some travelling preacher got hold of her, and she's half-cracked about it. The men just laugh at her; none of 'em's ever been sweet on her. But I haven't a bad knee, and I haven't got religion. Not so it hurts me, I haven't." She laughed impudently. "So a good lot of them have been sweet on me, one time and another!"

She threw her head back, so that her full brown throat showed, and filled her deep bosom with a breath. "Fisher was my man," she said, "till he went down below on that jail-breaking trip, and got shot up,—and—saw you!"

She looked at Anemone with perfectly candid,

rather dull hate. "He thought I was pretty," she said, "till he'd seen your nasty white face and little bird-bones that a real woman could crack in one hand. Then it was, 'Get out, Myra, you big lump!'" She gave a sort of awkward wriggle of a pain that was yet tinged with scorn and anger. The motion creased the flesh of her neck and shoulder and made her look fat and ugly. "Now you see why I want to help you to get away," she ended.

"Yes, I see. . . . Fisher Morne was—to marry you?"

"Marry me? What are you talking about? Who wants to marry anyone? He was my man, I tell you, and will be again, too, if I can get rid of you."

"I'm sure," said Anemone quite truthfully, "you're very welcome to him."

To her innocent surprise this seemed to irritate the mountain girl still more. "Who are you," she snapped, "to turn up your nose at him? He's too good for you, you damned pasty fool, and he'll be well rid of you! Welcome to him, indeed! Why, you ugly little beast, I could beat your face in for that!"

She clenched her big brown fists and looked absolutely ferocious. Anemone thought her unquestionably mad.

"Well, anyway," she said, soothingly, "you'll help me to get away, won't you?"

Myra looked at her in a surprise which gradually changed to something approaching pity.

"You're a pretty poor-spirited little rabbit, aren't you?" she said disdainfully. "I call you things that you'd ought to have shoved me over the cliff for,—or tried anyhow,—and you just think about getting away! Lord, I'm glad I'm not a coward. But I guess you get it from being born in the valley!"

The tolerant way in which she looked at her made Anemone feel incomprehensibly small and futile, as though she had gotten the worst of it, though as a matter of fact she knew that she had really behaved with great self-possession in her interview with the big, crazy hill girl.

"There's the old woman watching us from the door," said Myra suddenly. "We'll have to go in now, but when I go out to feed the dogs by and bye, say you want to go, too. And don't mind if I curse you for an interference and a bother, you come along anyhow!"

It was simpler than Anemone had feared. So sure were the Mornes of her timidity that it never occurred to them, once the night had fallen, to keep any sort of guard or watch upon her. When she moved restlessly about the big room, complained of the smoke, and asked meekly to be allowed to go with Myra while she fed the hounds, there was no comment beyond a harsh consent from Hagar and the gracious request of Myra that she

"keep her pasty, snivelling face as far away from her as she could!"

Lancer had hardly looked at her since the "fishing" expedition of the afternoon. Now as she left the room where he was smoking a pipe with some of the other men, he threw her a quick look with a smile in it, then glanced away. He was constantly doing that, seeming to ignore her, and then suddenly suggesting to her in an odd fashion of his own how intimately and continually she was in his thoughts. Anemone's respect for Myra's intelligence went up when she discovered that, although no one had noticed her leaving the room between her return with Anemone and the present moment, she had found opportunity in the interview to slip away to the shed and saddle a horse, which now stood waiting on the other side of the rock portal, with its guarding dogs.

The latter, with much growling and yelping, fell upon the food which Myra had brought them, and, either because they were too much occupied in eating to attend strictly to their duties, or because Myra was escorting the stranger, they let Anemone through to where the mountain pony waited in the starlight, upon the brow of the wild and formidable mountain.

Beyond them yawned the valley, white, mist-filled and mysterious,—inexpressibly menacing in that half-light which was almost more terrifying than complete darkness. The winds and the shadows, and the abyss of pale vapor, all made the night

seem alive, and uncanny, and full of spectral enemies. But Anemone who was almost equally afraid of the dark and of the horses, choked down her fright, and succeeded with Myra's help in clambering into the man's saddle on the horse's back.

"Now listen to me," whispered Myra close to the horse's side. "I can get you off, but I can't promise you much start. They'll miss you in a few minutes. The only chance is for you to go a way they won't expect. They'll be certain you'll keep to the main trail, being timid, so you mustn't. Breeze here can take any way that a human can, and you're safe with him. Now there's light enough for you to see until you get into the thick trees. You ride along the trail until it turns,—you know, —the whole thing is zigzag back and forth across the mountain. Well, don't turn there on the trail, but ride straight on to the left. Do you understand? If you ride on for about a mile,— it's just a rough hillside, but Breeze is sure-footed. —you'll strike an old tote road the lumber men used to use. It's half-choked up by birches now, but you can make out it was a road. Ride down that till you get to some of the shacks down there. None of our people live on that road, and all the other folks on the mountain hate us like poison. They'll probably see you get a lift back to your friends. Anyway it's the only chance. Maybe you'll meet some of your folks on the way. I should think it was time for 'em to be coming anyway."

"They don't know where I am," said Anemone. She hurried on: "Suppose I'm overtaken!"

"Well," said Myra with a shrug, "I can't help that."

"It's very dark!" breathed Anemone, staring out into the dimness, and trembling to feel and hear Breeze stamp impatiently.

"The moon won't rise for another twenty minutes," said Myra. "You'll get well down into the woods by that time, if you keep on steady enough."

"Any particular direction after I get to the tote road?" asked Anemone, for the great black gulf made by the steep incline of the mountain was a frightening undertaking in this darkness, and Myra's directions seemed none too lucid.

"Just down," said Myra laconically. "And keep on going. Are you afraid?"

"I'm not afraid of anything except the Mornes," said Anemone, lifting her small chin. A sudden thought struck her, and just as Myra was turning back she put her hand on her arm. "What will they do when they find out what you've done?"

"I don't know," said the other, indifferently. "Beat me, probably."

"Beat you! How horrible! They wouldn't surely!"

"Oh, don't you mind about that," interrupted Myra coolly, "I'd rather be beaten every day than have you spend another night under the roof."

She pulled her arm free from Anemone's hand and went up the steep bank in the darkness with no other word of good-by.

Anemone was left alone upon the trail.

CHAPTER XXII.

NIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS.

ANEMONE had often read stories in books of girls who were cast in the mould of heroines, and rode on dangerous night missions through the wildest country. Behold, she was playing this adventurous part herself! She, too, was riding through a dark and unknown region; she, too, was escaping from ruthless enemies; but she was a little disappointed, poor child, to find herself so little heroic as to mood. Ignorant of the great truth that he who fears not and goes into danger is brave, but that he who fears but also goes is braver, Anemone felt ashamed of her own tremors. She must, as Myra had so scornfully declared, be a pretty poor-spirited coward not to be stirred with a high excitement at this thrilling manner of escape. While as a matter of fact, she was thinking chiefly not of her glorious newly regained freedom, but of the chances of Breeze being able to find a foothold on this awful trail which she could barely even see; and of how many hours she must spend wandering at a dizzy angle through the night! She was shocked to find that she had reached so dire a

pitch that, down in her heart, she even thought with a fleeting wistfulness of the huge firelit room within the nature-built fortress of the terrible Mornes!

But she did ardently want to get away, and she forced herself to think of nothing but the central fact that she *was* getting away. She listened painfully as Breeze picked his way downward. Every moment she expected to hear a shout and a turmoil above her. But Myra had in some manner managed to put off the discovery of her escape. Downward another yard or two. It seemed interminable, though in reality a very few minutes had passed. To the nervous girl Breeze's hoofs seemed weighted with lead. She longed to urge him on, but terror of that precipitous depth before her prevented her. She shut her eyes and leaned on the sturdy neck before her, and prayed that he wouldn't fall—that they wouldn't start after her yet—that— But in truth she hardly knew what she prayed, for her thoughts were panicky and incoherent.

With a sort of clamber and shuffle, Breeze seemed to pause for a moment, and a shift of the angle at which she had been tilted, clinging, made her open her eyes and stare anxiously about. She had grown a little used to the starlight now, and she could see that she had reached the main trail cut from the hillside, and stretching to the left in a decline that was steep enough but nothing to the dizzy degree down which she had come. Breeze

seemed to know what was expected of him for he started down at a brisker walk,—and at that very moment she heard voices above her on the peak!

A loud call of some sort went ringing out. Her heart pounded. They had found out then! She strained her ears to hear more, and still Breeze went steadily on and down along the trail. She thought she could hear a horse high up there somewhere, but she could not be certain; the wind was fitful and tricked the listening ear.

She had an advantage for the moment she knew, for her pursuers must come almost as slowly as she down the first precipitous stretch and she was on better going now. But would she reach the turn in time? The next second she came to it, and thanked heaven. Sharp and clear the lower trail shot back into dimness, and Breeze wanted to follow it—from long habit, but Anemone's frantic tugs at his mouth sent him on to the turf to the left instead. The slope on which she found herself was a gentle one and the ground was springy. In a trembling voice she told Breeze to "get up," and with another wild prayer, this time that she would not fall off, they started off at a canter toward the woods and safety.

The glimmering starlight showed her the dark edge of trees looming above the curve over which she was riding. A sudden dreadful thought came to her: Could they see her from above? But she was pretty sure that it was too dark for that.

Still,—oh, she must, must get to cover before the moon rose!

To be recaptured and taken back by Lancer,—to see his triumph, to be again subjected to his love-making, and worst of all, to that treacherous weakness in herself which was sometimes glamoured by the love-making! Anemone's mouth set hard at the thought, and, at the risk of losing her seat, she chirped to Breeze and begged him to go faster.

She often wondered later how she ever kept in her saddle. She had ridden occasionally during her childhood, but had never been an expert horsewoman in any sense, even in a side-saddle. She could only think, when she came to think at all, that her will and determination to get away carried her through this, as other difficulties. At all events, frightened as she was, she never really slipped, nor had any serious trouble in keeping her seat.

And at last she reached the woods, and pulled Breeze up just inside the fringe of dark outer trees to listen again.

They were on the trail now,—the men. She could hear some pebbles rolling, started by the horse's feet, and once she was certain she could catch Lancer's voice, loud and clear, shouting some order. Would they go by the turn, and continue on the downward trail, or would she see them in a moment galloping over the crest of the bare hill by way of which she had just come? She seemed too paralyzed to ride on, and Breeze was content to stand quietly, so there they waited while the

night around her rustled and whispered with a thousand tiny sounds.

Then—she heard horse's hoofs not above, but below. Voices floated up to her. They had passed the place where she had turned off and gone down the trail. For a little time at least she was safe. Trembling with the reaction of that long minute of suspense, she touched Breeze with a whispered word and rode quietly into the forest.

She had never been in the woods at night, and found it like a dream full of uncanny and impossible terrors. The hallucinations and illusions of night out of doors assailed her from every hand. She lost her bearings entirely, and turned in the saddle to look behind her. Already many trees had intervened between her and the open, but between their trunks she could see a white radiance on the curving sweep of turf over which she had cantered.

The moon had risen! Even in that moment she remembered another moonrise.

She rode on. . . . It seemed to her that she rode for hours in a sort of trance. The queer murmurous silence, for the winds were quiet here, the countless small hushed noises, the motion of the horse, all seemed to mesmerize her. After a while she saw silvery patches on the laurel clumps, —the moon was rising high enough to throw its radiance even into this shadowed wilderness. She did not know how Breeze picked his way; she could

not guide him. It seemed miraculous to her that he did not trip over creepers or fallen trees. There was no path this way, but luckily the undergrowth was not excessive. The trees were wide enough apart now to show moonlit vistas—gradually growing broader. Then suddenly they thinned out still more, and she was in a clearing filled with the stumps of trees,—a clearing that stretched for some distance ahead. In it was a log cabin, evidently deserted. On the right, black between the moon-silvered masses of forest growth, a way of some sort had been cut. This clearly was the tote road Myra had described. With a dazed sort of wonder that she had been enabled, miraculously as it seemed to her, to find her way thus far, she turned Breeze down this road.

It proved to be a fairly good road, and not too steep. To Anemone it seemed a high road to liberty. And yet—and yet,—thankful as she was to be so near civilization again, and safe from the savagery of the Eagles,—she was conscious of Lancer's influence reaching out like a palpable grasp to hold her. Sometimes the thing seemed so tangible and so insistent that she looked back over her shoulder uneasily. Was she being hypnotized, she wondered dreamily? Were Lancer's will and Lancer's passion following her like living things, putting shackles upon her determination, upon her desires?

The next instant the uncanny illusion passed, swallowed up in a flood of normal relief and joy,

and she gave a little cry. For she had come around a bend in the tote road into the bright glare of a camp fire, and right in front of her was the kind and reassuring face of Luke Ellsworth!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEPUTY SHERIFF'S CAMP.

"ANEMONE! My dear!"

Luke Ellsworth had never before allowed himself to use toward her a term of endearment. Even in that instant he felt a momentary compunction, but Anemone had not even noticed it.

"Oh, Luke!" she cried, dropping the reins on Breeze's neck. "How wonderful that I should run into you like this!"

Luke was already helping her down,—lifting her, rather, with almost the solicitude one might show to a child or an invalid. But Anemone, with some impatience, slid from his clasp and shook out her skirts. Then she remembered Breeze and patted him, for he had carried her nicely and well.

"Sit here, Anemone," said Luke, protectingly pulling off his coat and throwing it down upon the ground. "You poor child, what you must have been through! Don't talk! Wait till you are stronger."

Anemone sat down on the coat obediently, but she looked up wide-eyed at his words.

"Why, Luke," she said, "I'm not tired or weak. It's nothing of a ride down the mountain."

She spoke almost resentfully. Ten minutes before she had felt utterly unnerved, but for some obscure reason this treatment of her as though she were a baby irritated her and put her rather huffily on the defensive.

"I know, I know," said the young man soothingly. Poor girl, she was all keyed up; he must be very gentle with her. "They—they didn't ill-treat you then, Anemone?"

"Ill-treat me!" And, to her own astonishment, Anemone laughed in his face,—not altogether pleasantly. "Of course they didn't ill-treat me. Why on earth should they want to do that?"

"Of course, we should have come for you long ago," proceeded Ellsworth, "but we could not guess it was the Mornes. We were afraid you had had some accident,—fall, or been struck by lightning or something—we have had search parties out ever since last night."

"Poor Cousin Sally," said Anemone, "I'm afraid she has been terribly anxious."

"She has been, of course,—but, curiously enough to my way of thinking, she has seemed less worried since the message came."

"What message?" demanded Anemone, with round eyes. Had those men dared send a message in her name? But Ellsworth elucidated this:

"The message from her nephew, saying that you were safe and well and he was taking care of you."

Anemone gasped, and changed color. Her first feeling was one of anger, but it shifted subtly to gratitude to Lancer who had saved Mrs. Breckenridge certain extremes of concern after all.

Hastily she said, "I am glad Cousin Sally's mind was relieved. Surely you didn't come alone, Luke?"

For the camp fire seemed to be deserted save by him.

"Oh, no," he said, "I have a company of picked men. They've all gone to rest and I'm on watch."

She saw then several recumbent forms among the trees.

"You look tired, Luke," she said, her glance coming back to his kind, serious face.

"I haven't slept for three nights," he said simply.

Her heart warmed grudgingly to him.

"The extraordinary thing," said Luke Ellsworth, "is that they should have kidnapped you at all. Of course, they were expecting a handsome ransom."

He did not see Anemone's eyes blazing at him from her colorless face as he went earnestly on. "But though Mrs. Breckenridge is well off she has not a big enough fortune to make it worth while, one would think, for them to run the risk. The Mornes are very far from being poor men themselves."

Anemone burst out with a vehemence that startled him: "You actually imagine that they stole me, and were holding me for *money?*"

"Why, of course they were," said Ellsworth, sur-

prised at the question. "What other motive could they have had?"

"Has it occurred to you," said Anemone, sitting up very straight indeed on his coat, "that they might have wanted *me*?"

He stared at her wonderingly, until her meaning dawned on him, then he colored slowly, and frowned, —she could see the frown even in that light, though the flush was practically lost in the reflection from the fire. She thought that it was normal resentment that any man or men of the Mornes should so dare, but his headlong words, as soon as he could find his voice, enlightened her.

"Anemone!" he exclaimed in a genuinely shocked tone. "How can you even imply such a thing? Of course,—you don't fully understand it," he hastened to add, "but even so, it's extraordinary to me that you should be able to speak of it! And so coolly,— so as though it were a matter of course, without resentment!"

And Anemone realized that he found her suddenly and unaccountably unwomanly. It was her turn to grow hot. Was he right? Was she in a few hours so utterly altered from what she had been? But—no! She again raised her head proudly. She would not even admit to herself there was anything intrinsically shameful in being loved, desired and wooed by men,—whatever the nature of the men, or the fashion of the wooing. This point of view was in truth quite new to her, and marked a very definite change, or development in

her nature, but she was not given to self-analysis and did not realize it.

Her Eagle Mountain experience, brief as it was, had left an imprint upon her for all time. She had been for the first time treated as a woman, not a child; that was why Luke Ellsworth's solicitude from the moment she had ridden into his camp had gotten so quickly upon her nerves. She had,—also for the first time,—been forced to think for herself, been forced to encounter other wills and prove hers as strong as theirs; she had learned that, on emergency, she could show some pluck, and that many of the things which she had looked upon as inevitable and necessary to life, were in fact extraneous and superfluous even to comfort. She had slept in her clothes,—a sweet and dreamless sleep; she had eaten coarse food, and heartily enjoyed it; she had talked intimately with a rude, perhaps an evil girl of the hills, and found herself none the worse for it. She had experienced a sense of admiration of sorts for the stern woman who was Lancer's mother; she had,—most illuminating and significant lesson of all,—felt the magic of youth and sex and passion and been with good reason afraid of it. And all these things had come to her in twenty-four brief hours. Was it strange that she should be altered from the light-hearted little Anemone whose chief amusements were singing silly songs and making *pot-pourri*?

Her excitement now in finding herself among friends had temporarily wiped out her fear of her

pursuers. For a minute or two she took it for granted in the headlong fashion of jumping to conclusions that belongs to great reactions of anxiety or suspense, that everything was all right now. Suddenly, whether because of a gust of livelier wind in the tree-tops, or of the cry and fright of a night owl, her nerves jumped again to attention.

"Luke!" she cried, grasping his arm in a swift tight grip. "I was forgetting! We ought to be moving on. They may be here at any moment!"

"They?" Luke looked with admiration at the small eager face. He seemed more interested in that than in the Mornes. She gave his arm a little shake.

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "I only had a few minutes' start of them and—"

"A few minutes!" repeated Ellsworth. "They should be here now, then." He looked about him, in the clumsy way of a slow-witted man.

"Oh, Luke," cried Anemone in despair, "don't look around like that as though you expected they might be hanging on the trees! They might not get here just yet, as a matter of fact, for they took a different turning. But we should be getting on."

"Now, Anemone," said the Deputy Sheriff with grave tenderness, "do you think you can make yourself comfortable for the night? It is too late to ride back to Rosvallon now."

"Why, Luke," exclaimed Anemone, "I think we should! They are following me you know, and—"

Luke smiled at her protectingly.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "They will not attempt

to get you while you are with us. We can take care of you now, Anemone, against ten Mornes."

"But there are twenty," objected Anemone, who was developing a helpless and incongruous sense of humor.

"Twenty, then," continued Ellsworth, only slightly disconcerted. "You are safe now, you poor girl. You do not have to worry, nor even think any longer. We will do it for you!"

His "we" sounded indefinably editorial, Anemone thought. He did indeed look strong and dependable and she looked with a measure of approval at his good face,—for it was a good face, full of gentleness and steadfastness. A certain phlegmatic quality about the man's personality jarred upon her keyed-up mood, however. It was with some irritation that she said:

"You haven't asked me a thing about how I escaped!"

"I don't want you to over-excite yourself to-night," said Luke Ellsworth, earnestly, and she nearly laughed in his face. "I want you to take some food, and then lie down and sleep. Wait, I will get you something to eat."

"I don't want anything to eat," said Anemone, impatiently. "I'm not a rescued arctic explorer, nor a shipwrecked sailor, you know, I had a perfectly good supper before I left."

It seemed to the man,—nay, it seemed to her, herself, and she was slightly ashamed of it,—that there was a distinct hint of asperity in her tone.

"Then," said Ellsworth, in the same gravely indulgent tone that he would use to an overwrought little girl, "just lie down near the fire and rest. I will get you a saddle-blanket. Do you think you can make yourself comfortable?"

He stood looking awkward and anxious. Anemone gave up the argument partly because she was actually tired, in spite of her spirited denials of the fact, and dropped down on the blanket. Immediately Ellsworth turned his back as though there were something slightly indelicate in his looking at his lady while she composed herself to sleep, even on a horse-blanket. Through Anemone's brain flitted a taunting memory of the night before, of the skilful hands that had prepared the most restful of couches for her, of the strong arms that had carried her to it so gently, of the handsome, passionate face that had bent above her as she lay there. . . .

She flung an arm across her eyes. Was she to be stabbed and pricked forever by these maddening associations of ideas? Had Lancer contrived to make every simple incident of life lead her thoughts back to him? She was running away from him, she never wanted to see him again, and yet his face was the clearest and most vivid thing to her in all the firelit camp that night.

After a moment she took her arm from her eyes and stared up at the luminous sky that glimmered between the dark and waving tree-tops. The night seemed quiet now except,—she was almost certain

she heard a twig snap. She sat up and listened. Ellsworth was pacing up and down.

"Luke!" she called softly.

He stopped at once.

"Did you hear anything?"

"Nothing. . . . Go to sleep, Anemone. I tell you, you are perfectly safe with *me!*"

He began to pace once more. One of the men, back among the trees began to snore, and his nearest companion punched him amiably in the ribs by way of protest. Anemone heard deep, good-humored mutterings, then silence again.

Still she sat strained and attentive, all her consciousness concentrated in the effort to hear what was not. . . . Then it came again, the stealthy crackling. Even the mountain people almost as silent on the trail as their brothers, the wild beasts, cannot walk through the woods at night without that intermittent betraying crackle of the dried stuff that nature has placed as warnings to their weaker enemies.

"Luke!" said Anemone again. She spoke sharply now, for this time she was sure. But she was too late. She saw her pacing protector stop short in his tracks, and at precisely the same moment a voice, strong and vibrant, rang through the camp:

"'Nds up!"

Anemone's heart stopped beating for the three seconds that followed. Then—the Deputy Sheriff's hands went up.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HANDS UP.

ANEMONE could have struck him. She scrambled to her feet, and looked at him with a scorn that pierced deep to the man's heart.

"Luke Ellsworth," she said in a tone of ice, "are you going to stand there in that—that idiotic position, and let them take me away before your eyes?"

"Anemone," said the Deputy Sheriff steadily, though there was pain in his voice, "it is for your sake. If they kill me, I can be of no more use to you. As it is, I can perhaps save you later."

Lancer gave a great roar of ringing laughter,—laughter that, however, did not shake the black muzzle that he still held pointed at Ellsworth. The sound of that sincere amusement stung Anemone like a whip. It made her loathe the Sheriff, and loathe herself for being in so ignominious a position.

"Save me!" she gasped, clenching her hands. "Why, you couldn't save me if you had a regiment of men to help you, and a battery of cannon! You couldn't save a mouse from a cat!"

Lancer had seen Anemone in the rôle of vixen

before; to Luke Ellsworth the shrewishness was as unexpected as it was distressing.

"Anemone!" he protested, forgetting that a tone of earnest expostulation is not in keeping with the position of a man with his hands up.

"Spare his feelings!" exclaimed Lancer, with cheerful malice. "He is one of those unfortunate fellows who have the knack of being inopportune! What was that he said a minute ago: 'I tell you, you are quite safe with me!' You know, we really should have entered on that; it was too good to miss. But we wanted to be sure that all the sleeping beauties in the wood were covered, first. Look at 'em, Anemone. Isn't that pure comedy for you? I can't turn round to point them out, but take a look for yourself."

Anemone moved her head and looked and even in that moment of impotence and shattered hopes, she had to bite her lips not to smile. For each of the Deputy Sheriff's "picked men" sat on the ground under a tree, with a sturdy outlaw standing over him. The faces of the captives all wore ludicrous expressions of astonishment, as who should say, like the old woman in the nursery rhyme, "This can't be I!" And the dark countenances above them were every one lighted by a broad grin. It was opera bouffe; not melodrama, but farce. Anemone felt suddenly as though her whole attempted escape had been ridiculous,—as ridiculous as those surprised men sitting on the ground,—almost, though not quite, as ridiculous as Luke Ellsworth stand-

ing there in calm dignity, with his two hands in the air. For herself, she felt not in the least like a heroine overtaken by ruthless pursuers and torn from the hands of her rightful rescuers and protectors; but, rather, like a bad and headstrong little girl who has run away from home and is being fetched back by her tolerant and rather humorous guardians.

"Mat!" called Lancer, sharply, and one of the men, not already engaged in guarding the upholders of law and order, slouched forward.

The young leader gave a few brief and trenchant directions, starting with the confiscation of arms and ending with the securing of the prisoners to the trunks of sundry trees.

"Pick out good shady trees," added Lancer, generously. "They may need shelter before morning. I smell rain."

There was indeed a growing dampness in the air, a sure sign of wet weather in the hills. Valley-dwellers sometimes get this moisture from the mists of the lowlands, but your mountaineers will only smell water in the cumulus rain clouds that swoop down upon them on the big winds.

In five minutes the law was disarmed and bound as comfortably as might be to the trees, in a sitting posture so that they need not suffer undue fatigue. They looked more comic than ever, trussed up with their arms close to their bodies and their legs sticking out in front of them like the limbs of wooden dolls. Lancer himself was several times over-

come with helpless mirth, but he managed to oversee the general arrangements with business-like dispatch if not decorum.

By this time Ellsworth, too, was disarmed; Lancer thrust his own revolver into his belt, and apparently forgot him.

One of the men, in obedience to another swift direction, now led up Breeze.

Lancer turned to Anemone with blunt authority: "Let me put you up. We'll have to get started, if we're to get home before the storm breaks."

Home! He dared use that word to her! She stiffened in every muscle at the affronting sound of it. Home,—for her,—in the Eagle's Eyrie! . . .

He came up to her in the peremptory fashion she resented, and stooped to make her a rest. But she drew away from him.

"I can get up by myself," she said coldly, with, however, a sinking of the heart as she looked up at Breeze,—suddenly, it seemed, grown extremely tall and inaccessible.

Lancer had a moment of sharp temptation to let her try and ignominously fail. Then he thought better of it.

"Nonsense!" he said, laughing, and picking her up bodily, he set her squarely on the horse's back as he might have put her on a shelf, busying himself with the examination of Breeze's bit and bridle while she swung her leg over and scrambled into place. She was getting used to the odd feeling of riding astride now, but, in spite of her-

self, she experienced a passing wish that she were wearing some garment less absurdly unsuitable for a riding habit than that wretched pink gown.

"By Jove, the storm is coming up with a vengeance," said Lancer, glancing up.

The moon had gone out, and the hills were moaning.

"More wind than rain," said the man Mat, wetting his finger and holding it up to get the exact direction of the light air,—for as yet there was only the lightest breeze in their sheltered position.

Lancer shook his head.

"Plenty of rain," he said, "but there's no thunder. It'll be one of those downpours with wind thrown in. If it gets too bad we'll have to stay over night at Philla's."

There was a growl of discontent from the men.

"Philla!" muttered one. "I'd rather take a licking than go to that gal's house!"

"Always prayin' over a man," grumbled another, "an' tellin' what durned sinners the Mornes are!—oh, hell!"

"Why cyan' we go on up home t'night?" demanded one belligerent voice.

"Because," said Lancer, crisply, "the trail's been washed out badly twice this year, and I'm taking no chances with a girl along. Also, in case you want another reason," he rapped out, "because I say so."

He then turned his attention to Ellsworth, who,

disarmed and looking as he felt, exceedingly awkward, was standing apart, regarding the proceedings. He was at a cruel disadvantage and he knew it. What man can show creditably in a situation like this? For one miserable moment, the Deputy Sheriff almost wished that he had taken a chance at being shot up rather than forced to appear in so humiliating a light to Anemone Breckenridge.

Lancer strolled up to him, insolently in command of the situation and not in the least disposed to let the other man forget the fact.

"It doesn't really seem as if it were worth while tying you up," he said, considering the Deputy Sheriff coolly. "I don't reckon you can make much trouble for us without your gun. Anyway—" he paused and looked up and down deliberately. "Evidently," he went on, "you aren't a chap to take chances."

The Deputy Sheriff flushed darkly as he stood unarmed and helpless before the insult.

"But as you might untie some of these fellows of yours we'll just fix your hands for you so that they can't get into mischief. Satan finds mischief still for idle hands to do, you know. Mat, got a rope? Good! Now, my friend, you have shown that one of your favorite poses is with your hands up. So, just so that you'll be comfortable, *we'll tie them that way for you!*"

CHAPTER XXV.

WIND AND RAIN.

THEY did it, too. And when Anemone and her escort of outlaws rode out of the zone of the camp fire they left behind them the Deputy Sheriff with his hands tied together and the far end of the rope thrown a couple of times around a branch over his head. It was not a secure fastening,—barely in fact more than a temporary concession to Lancer's derisive mood. The first good tug would bring the rope down and Ellsworth would be free to start on his journey for help. But, as he scorned to struggle in the presence of his foes, the Sheriff forbore to give the tug until they should have left the clearing. So the picture which Anemone carried away with her in her brain was of that very excellent and proper young man shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other, with his hands still held up over his head.

She could hear Lancer chuckle though it was now too dark to see him. She clung blindly to Breeze's mane, for the night through which she had ridden earlier that evening was lucid and enlivening compared to this choking blackness. The ever increasing gusts of wind sang violently and suddenly in

her ears,—and died again as suddenly, leaving a sort of vacuum of sound in which the echo of the horses' hoofs seemed abnormally noticeable. Then again the gale would rise and rush upon them furiously with a scream of menace.

It was in one of the pauses between the whirlwinds that Lancer, who had been riding silently at Anemone's bridle, spoke. His voice was low, carefully pitched to carry no further than her ear.

"Have you had enough of running away?"

"It is like you," said Anemone bitterly and making no effort to lower her voice, "to make me feel my helplessness and my failure."

"Have I made you feel that?"

She smothered an impatient ejaculation for all answer.

"Because," he added coolly, "I am very glad if I have made you feel your helplessness and your failure. It will keep you from trying it again."

"I shall go on trying it again," said Anemone, sternly rebellious, "as long as I live. Sometime I shall succeed."

What weird involuntary sympathy existed between this man and herself,—she demanded of her own soul,—that she knew with certainty at this point that he was smiling at her in the darkness? . . . When he spoke, however, it was quite seriously:

"You are quite welcome to go on trying, of course, if it gives you pleasure. I dare say it is, after all, experience for you." (Brute!) "But I shall bring you back every time."

"And," she asked abandoning one point for another, "would you really like me to be the sort of woman who would sit down meekly, and submit to being held prisoner, without ever making any attempt to get back my liberty?"

"Why, no," he said simply, "I love you for your spirit, dear. You wouldn't be fit to be an eagle's mate if you didn't have to be conquered. I'm rather proud of myself, though, that I recognized just that quality in you while other people were treating you and thinking of you as a nice, pretty, sweet little young girl who looked well in white."

Conversation languished after this. Anemone was disgusted to discover that, absolutely, she could not think of anything to say.

There was neither need nor chance to say anything, as it happened, for the big wind came upon them just then, and racing after it came the rain,—not the temperish rain of a thunderstorm, but the heavier, more driving deluge that is going to stay for a while.

Nowadays nobody,—except a few among the really great ones, and only a *very* few among them,—can write adequately of tempests. They run to excess of words, without ever hitting on the right ones, for even in this cold language of ours there are a number of right words if poor wretches of writers knew where to find them. But we don't. Milton could describe a storm, and Byron, and Kipling has a touch when it comes to mid-ocean, or wind-storms on the Indian plains. But little people go mad try-

ing to pour it all out. They can see it, the little people can,—they can hear the cruel music of it, they can even feel it and the rush of eternity it lets in through the open doors of the sky, but when they try to describe it they go up in smoke of futile, hysterical verbiage. So we will simply say just here, that the storm that broke that night was one of the maddest through which even these Virginian mountaineers had ever ridden. They were riding on the tote road where the wind could draw magnificently, and was sucked along the open way as though a mighty bellows drew it in. As they were headed upward they got the full burst for the gale came thundering and whistling over the mountain's crest, flying, as if it were made of an army of howling warlocks, down the hillside.

The horses could hardly go against it, and the riders lost their breath even bent double over their animal's necks. In a few minutes Lancer shouted in Anemone's ear that it was no use, they must ride to shelter. How he communicated his will to the other men above that clamor, Anemone never knew. She had given up trying to think for the present,—the tempest was too engrossing.

She felt Lancer's hand above hers on the reins more than once, but she did not know nor care where she was being taken. The wind choked her and made her feel dizzy. Several times the same steady hand came for a moment under her elbow as she drooped tremulously in the saddle.

"It'll only be a few minutes now," she heard Lan-

cer shout cheerily in her ear. "There's my brave girl!"

She was too far gone to resent the little tenderly proprietary phrase. In fact she thought dully that it was, if anything, rather encouraging. . . . She had closed her eyes long since, and did not open them until, in a lull in the storm, she heard something that sounded like loud knocking, and the voice of that shouted password which she remembered so well:

"Hello there! Hello there! Is anyone at home? *Open the door to the Mornes!*"

She had never expected to enter a house behind that insolent traditional command!

Over their heads just then the gods of storm emptied a vast kettle of water. Never was seen a rain like that,—or so Anemone thought, almost awed by its suddenness and violence. She had never been in a cloudburst before. Under it she was flattened down on the horse's back much as a flower would be under an overturned bucket. Just as she was beginning to think that there had never been anything in the world except wind and rain, she saw a crack of light grow to an oblong, and heard a high melancholy voice exclaim, with a peculiar suggestion of intoning:

"Enter, friends. The Lord bids us give shelter even to the most miserable sinners!"

Such was Anemone's introduction to Philla Morne.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PHILLA'S RELIGION.

It seemed quite in the proper nature of things that Lancer should lift her down and half lead, half carry her into Philla's cottage. When he had her settled in the one approximately easy chair in the house, he said briefly:

"Try a little of your Christian charity on a lady who is pretty well tired out, Philla. A little Christian charity and a cup of hot tea with something else in it,—rum or brandy or 'white liquor' if you have it."

Anemone heard the same cold plaintive voice respond:

"No man nor woman receives spirituous liquors under my roof, Lancer Morne. As for the tea,—I was having a cup of tea myself."

Anemone, through dazed half-lifted lids, saw in fact a clean wooden table set with a brown tea-pot and a cup so coarse as to be scarcely more than a china mug. There was also a small black book, evidently a Bible. Beside the latter she saw a muscular brown hand which looked in some way familiar,

though she had never consciously noticed his hands, and in it lay a small leather-covered flask.

"All right," he said without impatience. "Here's the spirituous liquor, if you will kindly pour out the tea. And get a move on, Philla," he added, the merry inflexion taking the rudeness out of the slang.

Vaguely Anemone was conscious that there was a whisk of skirts in the room and then a hand,—the same strong hand,—held a cup to her lips. Hot tea, —with an odd pungent flavor, seemed to clear out the fog in her brain, and she mustered strength to take the cup into her own hand, to sit up and look about her.

Philla Morne's cottage was as neat as a pin. Although it was very primitive as to construction and very elementary as to furniture, its family resemblance to the other Morne house which Anemone had seen stopped there. Here an obvious effort seemed to have been made to create an atmosphere of absolute cleanliness, order and sobriety. It was evident that Philla scrubbed floors, wiped walls, and washed furniture daily. For every coarse and clumsy thing in the place shone with a chill spotlessness.

From this general survey of the surroundings, Anemone's gaze travelled as far as her hostess herself.

Philla was slim and younger than one would have expected from her lugubrious voice. In spite of her life in a cabin on the mountain, she was not noticeably sunburned. Indeed, her almost unnatural pallor of

skin made Anemone think of a phrase from Kipling, —"White as a rain-washed bone." Anemone herself was pale, but it was a clear and delicate pallor, fresh as that of a flower's pallor: in the whiteness of Philla Morne's face there was something unwholesome and blanched like a plant that has been long living without sufficient light and air. Her eyes were sharply blue and as sharply cold; her hair was a colorless flaxen and strained back from her forehead so tight that it pulled her eyebrows up in an eternally enquiring expression. There was, however, nothing of the questioner in Philla's temperament, she was profoundly self-sufficient and had no desire for greater light than had already graciously been vouchsafed her. She might have been hard if she had not been so impersonal: she might have been intense if she had not been so complacent. A curious woman she was, very difficult to understand though perhaps less difficult than people believed her.

The secret, and the root of Philla Morne's queerness, was her lame leg. This had, from the beginning of her life, set her in a sense apart from her more lusty kinspeople and forced her to find her interests in less violent and healthy things. A few years before this particular summer, she had met a travelling Evangelical preacher, and his exhortations, even as Myra had told Anemone, had turned all her idle energies into religious channels. Her religion was not in itself much of a comfort to her, but it engrossed her completely, and wiped out much that was gnawing and discontented in her empty life. She had

been rather looked down upon by the sturdy Morne tribe, and indifferent as she pretended to be, it had always galled her to the soul. Now that she had religion she could at least pretend that she could do the looking down herself. To be the one pious person in a brood of infidels was a very precious source of pride and gave her every excuse for that superiority which was still for her so fresh an indulgence. She had, of course, overworked her pious obsession and made herself an unconscionable nuisance and burden to her relatives, but what did that matter? It made her, probably, happier than anything ever had before,—and that although she had as little real heart and aptitude for religion as you could find in a day's journey among womankind!

Her father had been one of the hearty, drinking, swearing, fighting Mornes of Abner's generation,—a hard-fisted, fierce, open-hearted old blackguard, who when he died a year before had told his daughter with a singular and inappropriate humor that bubbled up between his death-gasps, that the best thing she could was to burn her Bible lest it make another damned psalm-singer of her mother, too. It did not succeed in this, for his widow,—a slip-shod shrewish fat soul that had in all ways been a fit mate for him,—succumbed to the bitter winter a month or two later and died almost as far from the odor of sanctity as her dead lord.

Thus relieved of both her unregenerate parents, Philla cleaned the cabin thoroughly for the first time since it had been built, set the much-reviled Bible

upon a table in the middle of the room and settled down to a life of prayer for her unredeemed family.

The other Mornes did not like her, but often overlooked her stand-offish ways, bad manners and tendency to preach, on the generous grounds of her "bad knee." So she lived alone month after month, and it was one of the very few Morne houses where the clan did not readily knock in times of stress. Things had to be pretty bad before the Mornes claimed from Philla the loyalty of the blood tie.

"What sinful work have you been on this night, Lancer Morne?" demanded Philla as though she alone represented the Court of the Last Judgment.

"Kidnapping," replied Lancer in the pleasantest and most ready fashion conceivable. In just such a conversational tone he might have answered, "Riding," or "Trap shooting," or "Playing tennis."

Philla nodded her head slowly.

"I thought as much!" she said sadly. "Poor creature! May the Lord guard her!"

"No doubt He will!" remarked Lancer in business-like accents. "Have you an extra bed, Philla, or shall she take yours?"

Their hostess looked somewhat taken aback for a moment, then she said with stiff melancholy, "We are bidden to share our best with the needy. Let her have my bed."

"Oh!" exclaimed Anemone who had recovered herself somewhat. "I couldn't think of taking your bed!"

"Don't be silly, Anemone," said Lancer. "Of course you'll take it. You're dead tired."

There was, the girl felt, a very signal difference between Lancer's way of assuming and providing for her fatigue, and Luke Ellsworth's!

"But what will she do?" she persisted, looking at Philla Morne rather shyly.

The pale young woman folded her long, bloodless hands and answered gently:

"I will sit up and pray for all your souls."

"Believe me," put in Lancer, speaking reassuringly to Anemone, "there is nothing which she likes better. You are doing her a favor! Lead the way, Philla!"

He started to pick Anemone up again, but she waved him away with firmness.

"I'm perfectly able to walk!" she said crossly. "I seem to have been carried about lately as though I were a bag of flour! Where is that room?"

Lancer's eyes twinkled, but whether with amusement, approval or tenderness, she could not be sure. Perhaps there was a touch of all three.

Philla with marked deliberation lighted a candle and led the way into a bare and rather dreary little bedroom with a narrow camp bed. Upon this Anemone thankfully dropped, as soon as she had crawled out of her wet things and into a dreadful woollen wrapper of Philla's.

It seemed to her that she was asleep as soon as her head touched the one hard pillow. . . . She began to dream the fantastic fitful dreams that are born of exhaustion when it is nervous as well as physical.

. . . Every sort of weird and grotesque vision flitted through her brain; voices spoke to her;—a horse galloped and stumbled under her,—she fell over numberless precipices and fought with divers foes of varying degrees of ferocity. One of them,—she could not be sure who it was, but it looked ridiculously like poor innocent Luke Ellsworth,—took hold of her shoulder and began to shake her, at first gently and then with violence. Out of this dream she struggled with a gasp to find that the hand upon her shoulder was a real one.

The candle standing on the table had burned almost down to the holder in which it stood. By the faint and wavering flame that was left she saw Philla Morne bending over her.

As Anemone stared up at her with drowsy and bewildered eyes, the white-faced woman put a finger to her own lips and shook her head.

"Get up at once!" she whispered. "Someone wants to see you. You are going to be taken away!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CHOICE.

The rain had entirely ceased, but the moon was shining with a more startling clarity than ever as Anemone, giddy with interrupted sleep, went across the tiny bedroom and into the bare living-room where she had first been brought earlier that evening. On the table stood the same kerosene lamp, but the tea-things had been cleared away. Nothing showed up now against the coarse brown table-cover but the aggressive little black Bible.

Anemone's sleepy eyes fell on the brown cloth. "Couldn't she get any other color?" she thought, "or does she like it?" As a matter of fact, Philla was color-blind, tone-deaf and deficient in both taste and smell,—an unfinished product from the standpoint of nature.

"It has been given to me," said the pale woman impressively, "to repair a great wrong done by my wicked kinspeople. The curse of the Lord rests upon them, for they are enemies of religion as well as of law. Sister,—you are free! Go in peace."

Philla's phrases were bookish and her gestures

stilted. She now pointed stiffly to the open door,—and standing in it, framed by the darkness, was Luke Ellsworth. His hands were free,—a pair of heavy scissors hanging at Philla's waist suggested the way. He now held them out toward Anemone a moment, full of eagerness and urgency.

"Anemone, dear!" he exclaimed in a guarded undertone, the endearment slipping from him involuntarily for the second time that night. "Thanks to this young lady, this good, kind Christian woman, I have it in my power at last to really get you away! I knew that the chance would be given to me if I were spared!"

His face was glowing with what struck Anemone as rather anticipatory triumph,—also the hands held out to her were the same that had gone up before a revolver a few hours earlier.

"How did you get here?" she asked brusquely. And then she added, glancing about her, "Where are —the rest of your family, Miss Morne?"

"There was no room in the cabin," said Philla, "so they are sleeping in the lean-to. Lancer wished you to be alone in the bedroom so as not to be disturbed, so I said I would sleep here."

"But what is the lean-to?" asked the girl. "And isn't it very near? Won't they hear us talking?"

"It is a woodshed, and they are all sound asleep," said Luke Ellsworth. "I reconnoitered just now. We must hurry though, Anemone. By the time they wake in the morning we will be safe in the valley, among decent people, ready to protect us."

"Aren't you rather previous?" said Anemone, coolly. She was quite wide awake now and considering the matter with a dispassionateness amazing to Luke who had expected her to be hysterically eager for her freedom. "Suppose they happen to wake before the morning? They might for all you know start after us twenty minutes after we've left."

"Ah, but there is where Miss Morne will help us!" exclaimed Ellsworth, his eyes alight. "Explain your splendid plan!" he added to Philla.

"They will take coffee before they start," she said. "I shall have it boiling while the horses are being saddled, and they will all want it to wake them up. Then they will all go to sleep again!"

She spoke without emotion,—so naturally that at first Anemone did not grasp her meaning.

"There!" said Luke Ellsworth, "Isn't it a perfect plan?"

"But," said the girl, "I don't understand. Why should they go to sleep again?"

Philla Morne went to a shelf and took down a small wooden box, which she put upon the table and opened. In it were a number of small boxes and packages. One of these, a little oblong packet of brown paper, she held up. The first smile Anemone had seen her wear yet played faintly over her white face.

"My mother was one of the old-time Morne women," she said. "She could make all sorts of—medicines. This is something she made to put people to sleep. It has poppy seed, and hops, and a lot of stuff that I don't know in it, and some pure opium,—

my father got it from a Chinaman he hid in the hills after a murder row somewhere near Clifton Forge. It makes people sleep and sleep!—I don't know just how much to give, but I reckon if I put it all in the two coffee-pots, it'll be safe to work on all of them."

She laid the little brown packet upon the table, and quietly closed and carried back the box to its shelf.

"You understand now!" said the Deputy Sheriff exultantly, smiling at Anemone.

The girl's face was colorless and round her eyes were dark circles of fatigue. She looked,—the young man thought,—like an avenging angel, with that stern look, and that quivering authority.

"Yes!" she cried, and to the concern of the others, she let her voice ring out clearly in the little room. "Yes,—I do understand now! No wonder I didn't at first. No wonder I couldn't understand that a woman who talks about being a Christian could plan to trick and drug her own people with stuff that she admits she does not know how to give safely; nor that a decent man and a representative of the law could cheerfully and gratefully lend himself to the arrangement! No wonder you look at the door, Luke Ellsworth,—no wonder you are desperately afraid they'll hear me, and come and give you the punishment you deserve. Why, you two—" she looked in horror from one face to the other—"might kill some of those men, by giving them too much of that horrible stuff! And I believe you would both be glad!—Oh, you make me

ashamed of being human!" gasped poor Anemone, sick and incoherent with indignation.

"Anemone," said Luke Ellsworth, who had lost some of his own healthy color under her tirade, "we are doing this for you."

"Doing it for me, indeed!" cried Anemone with renewed vehemence. "You're doing it because you're both cowards, and want to get the better of—of the others—" she stumbled a little just here—"in a mean, detestable way like this because you can't do it in any other. That woman"—she pointed wildly at Philla who stood glaring at her with a viperous hate in her light-colored eyes—"has a grudge against her own family,—that's why she's doing it. And you, Luke Ellsworth—"

"Surely," he broke in warmly, "you can't have any doubt that I would not do anything on earth for you, Anemone."

"Anything on earth," said Anemone with a deadly directness, "that didn't get you into danger! Anything on earth,—any low trick, any mean, underhand plan,—anything but fight for me like a man!"

"Anemone, I would die for you—"

"But you didn't," said Anemone, and he knew that, reasonably or unreasonably, she would never forgive him for his surrender in the camp that night.

She had gotten control of herself in a measure and now she walked quite steadily over to the table and picked up the packet.

"I don't think," she said, breathing quickly, "that

either of you is to be trusted with strong drugs."

In spite of a cry of protest from Philla, she deliberately tore the brown paper to pieces and let the fine gray powder it contained fly useless on the gusty wind from the open door.

"How dare you!" panted Philla, looking a sicklier white than ever. "It was my property."

"Yours!" said Anemone, looking at her. "You are worse than the moonshiners,—a worse outlaw. Don't you know that it is just as illegal to make opium drugs secretly, as it is to distill whiskey,—and twice as dangerous? Your property, indeed!"

"She's crazy," said Philla Morne. "You'd better go and leave her. She's made her choice. She prefers to be taken up to that horrible home of crime and violence rather than—"

"Rather than resort to a plan like yours?" Anemone finished for her. "Yes, I do! If that has to be the alternative, then I have made my choice. But don't think for a moment that my hopes end with you! I'll get away from the Mornes yet, but I swear it will never be with your help."

Philla raised a warning hand.

"Listen!" she said, quickly. "Someone is coming!"

Luke Ellsworth faded from the doorway into the night, and Anemone was destined not to see him again for many a moon to come. Before she and Philla could renew hostilities, they heard the sound of a horse stopping and Mat's deep tones from somewhere without asking if "everything was all right."

To the astonishment of both women it was Lancer who answered, in rather weary accents: "All right. Take the horse, Mat. I guess I'll get some sleep."

"Lord knows you need it," came the hearty response and they could hear the horse being led away. Followed the slow sound of footsteps, retreating to the left of the cabin in the direction of the lean-to.

"Where has he been?" asked Anemone in a whisper. Philla shook her head.

"I didn't know he had gone anywhere," she said.

In a moment they heard steps again, and this time Mat's ruddy face looked in at the door.

"Anything doing?" he asked, looking in surprise at the two women.

"What did *he* ride away for?" answered Philla.

Mat hesitated, then he said, in a low growl:

"The dear damned fool of a lad rode down to untie them chaps of the Sheriff's. Said he couldn't trust that gawk of a Sheriff to get help to 'em in time to keep some of 'em from bein' knocked out by exposure,—Blamed fool nonsense! . . . God bless him!" And Mat departed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE REV. MR. HOTCHKISS RECEIVES A SUMMONS.

THE Reverened Mr. Hotchkiss was not of what is known as a good cavalry build. He was not made for riding, and was neither comfortable nor prepossessing in the saddle. His legs were short, and knock-kneed rather than bowed, which gave his feet a tendency to stick out unduly on either side of his mount. He was, moreover, of that jellylike consistency of flesh which is always lamentably shaken up by any gait save that of the slowest of cab-horse-walks.

Therefore, even though he lived among mountains, the Reverend Mr. Hotchkiss, when he could, avoided parochial visits which had to be made by trail. He had a horse and buggy with the aid of which he jogged up to many remote places in all manner of weather, for he was a good and faithful little servant of righteousness, and did his best by anyone who would let him do it.

But once in a while there came a call from the farther hills which he could not reach in anything with wheels, and which he would not refuse. Then

the little parson put on his riding gaiters over his black cloth trousers, donned a sun-hat, and fared forth with some sandwiches and the Book of Common Prayer. The sandwiches he consumed as he jolted up the trail, and, being eaten under such uneasy conditions, they invariably and quite naturally gave him acute indigestion. The prayer book was for the solace or assistance of the mountain family whither he was bound, but he rarely knew what part of it he would be called upon to read,—the Visitation to the Sick, the Sacrament of Marriage, the Baptism of Infants, or the Burial of the Dead, for his call came usually through many intermediary messengers, and was rarely very definite or circumstantial by the time it reached him. Also, on more than one occasion, the Book of Common Prayer had been fired across the room by an ungrateful recipient of the churchly comfort. For though the mountain wives sometimes sent for him when their lords were dangerously ill, the husbands themselves seldom took any more kindly to the doctrines or the exponents of religion in their hours of weakness than in their years of strength.

So it came about that when the brief message came to Mr. Hotchkiss one morning late in August to the effect that one John Finney of Lower Eagle Mountain desired his services immediately, the good rector was not unduly surprised, and merely sighed a little as he dug his gaiters out of his bureau drawer.

Eagle Mountain,—even Lower Eagle, a minor spur of the big range,—was not to be explored in a

buggy. The Reverend Mr. Hotchkiss must face the trials of one of his weariful mountain rides,—jolting, sandwiches, uncertainty, indigestion, and all.

He stopped at Mrs. Breckenridge's house to enquire for her. He knew that she had been prostrated with anxiety, since her husband's young cousin had been stolen away from her, and since Luke Ellsworth, the Deputy Sheriff, had returned with the extraordinary intelligence that Anemone had refused his help in getting away, electing to stay with her captors. The young man may perhaps be pardoned for adding nothing more to this brief report. The whole thing was, not astonishingly, a rather sore memory with him.

Mr. Hotchkiss found Mrs. Breckenridge on the veranda, in a rocking-chair, her idle hands in her lap. She seemed unable to keep her mind upon anything long enough to finish it nowadays.

The servants talked together of her restlessness. "Seems lak she cyan' keep still," said Aunt Mallie to Wakeman; and Wakeman answered, "I don't see why that gal don't come back nohow."

"Maybe," said Mallie, who was a true woman and sentimental, in spite of being black and weighing two hundred and twenty, "maybe she's gwine marry one of dem mountain fellers. Hi! specks dey's tur'ble fine figgers o' men, even ef they isn't much on de fear o' de Lawd!"

Mr. Hotchkiss did not dismount. It required too much strength of character and of muscle to get onto the horse once for him to ever get off again till he

had to. But he took off his hat and beamed sympathetically at the lady.

"No news yet, ma'am?" he said gently.

Mrs. Breckenridge shook her head. Her lips were pressed tightly together, and the fierce and anxious light in her bright blue eyes was now allowed to glitter unveiled. She looked more haggard than ever, markedly older.

"No news," she said, speaking rather abruptly. "It seems, Mr. Hotchkiss, it actually seems as though Anemone really has grown to *like* it there, doesn't it?"

"That, of course, is what we must assume, from what Luke Ellsworth tells us," said the rector, thoughtfully, "but she is much too young a girl to make so momentous a choice. Has it occurred to you, ma'am—" he spoke with some hesitation—"that your young cousin may have gone in the first place of her free will,—eloped, as it were?"

"No," said Mrs. Breckenridge, "it never had occurred to me. But I dare say I have been blind in many ways. Anemone is really a woman, though I have been thinking of her as a child. Even so extraordinary a thing as that might be true without my suspecting it. I know," she added, frowning at the recollection, "that Anemone had met my nephew Lancer Morne before they met here that evening. They recognized each other at once and with, I thought, some feeling, and Lancer said something about moonshine or moonlight or something. If

Anemone *has* gone to them of her own free will—" She broke off with a troubled gesture.

"You surely will not let her go without a struggle," said the clergyman. "You surely will try to get her to give up this unwise and harebrained idea of living with a band of outlaws?"

"I married the man I loved and left the outlaws," said Sarah Breckenridge. "I sha'n't stand in Anemone's way of marrying one of them if she loves him. I believe in every girl's choosing her own man."

For the first time Mr. Hotchkiss sensed in the quietly dressed Southern lady a more primitive element working to the surface. For the first time he saw distinctly the Morne in her.

"But," Mrs. Breckenridge added gravely, "if—though that too seems incredible,—they are keeping Anemone against her will, I will do or give anything to get her back. If I could reach them with a trusty messenger I would send them word that all but a quarter of my fortune will go to them—to my sister and Abner, to be divided and used as they see fit,—if they will send Anemone back to me safe. I would offer it all," she added indifferently, "only Anemone and I would have to have something to live on."

Little Mr. Hotchkiss looked at her with a measure of admiration. Though he was not a worldly or an avaricious man, he had a fairly just idea of the importance of money in the scheme of things. Most country parsons have, poor things. He could readily understand sacrificing a fortune for somebody one loved, but it was a little hard for him to comprehend

doing it so casually. Here again was the mark of a race given to a large habit of mind, accustomed to decide big issues briefly, and to invariably place purely human considerations above those of business or of justice.

His horse, beginning to move backward and forward alarmingly, reminded Mr. Hotchkiss that he must be off. A sudden idea struck him though he was doubtful of its feasibility. He led up to it tentatively.

"I am just off on a duty ride," he said, "one of those very acute tests of zeal which the Lord sees fit to give me occasionally." He smiled all over his kind, rubicund face. "It is a long ride," he added.

"I know they tire you very much," said Mrs. Breckenridge, trying to appear interested. "Is it down the Gap?"

"It is to Eagle Mountain," said Mr. Hotchkiss.

Mrs. Breckenridge gave a great start, and leaned forward, her hands on the arm of her rocker.

"Eagle Mountain!" she exclaimed. "Who has sent for you from there?"

"It is Lower Eagle," said the clergyman, "and the name, I believe, is Finney; I am not sure. You know these summons come to me in very garbled form. A man with a load of wood for some farm down the Gap stopped at the Rectory before breakfast this morning to say 'the Parson was wanted for John Finney of Lower Eagle'. He said anyone at the foot of the mountain could direct me."

"Finney!" repeated Mrs. Breckenridge, reflect-

ively, and shook her head. Evidently the name meant nothing to her, but Mr. Hotchkiss's idea was beginning to take further shape in her own mind. "If you are going to Eagle," she said, looking at him, with her sharp and anxious blue eyes, "it is just possible that you might hit upon somebody whom you could trust to take a message to Anemone, or find out something about her real attitude of mind?"

"Dear lady," said Mr. Hotchkiss, "that is just what I was thinking myself."

"You will have difficulty of course in finding anyone with access to the Mornes," Mrs. Breckenridge went on. "The mountain people all hate them unless they are in some way tied up by them and forced to be loyal in spite of themselves. But it is just a chance. Remember, though," she added, "it is not worth your while to run any risks. It's a wild country up there, and full of wild people. If you can find someone who would be willing to take a message, promise him money of course."

"How much?" asked Mr. Hotchkiss.

"As much as you have to," said Mrs. Breckenridge, as nearly impatiently as she ever allowed herself to speak to him.

She got up abruptly and began to pace the veranda, as though she could not endure sitting still. As Mr. Hotchkiss rode away he saw her tall figure moving up and down with something of the caged wild animal in its step. With one of his occasional flashes of perspicacity, Mr. Hotchkiss divined that

she was wishing that for a little while she were not a Southern lady with a charming house to keep, and were free to herself ride off to Eagle Mountain and see Anemone.

The Breckenridge place looked rather desolate, as though Anemone's absence had communicated itself in a sense of subtle melancholy to the house and grounds as well as the inmates. Aunt Mallie, hanging out clothes at the back, was not singing a hymn. There had been rain, and some winds big for the valley, and the garden was crushed and muddy-looking. As for the roses, they were past anyway, and the last scattered petals blew about among the rushes. Mrs. Breckenridge did not make *pot-pourri* nowadays.

Mr. Hotchkiss, with a heavy sigh in which pity for Mrs. Breckenridge combined very humanly with pity for himself, set out for his long ride. And he rode for hours in a broiling sun, halting at noon in the middle of a ford so his horse could drink, and taking advantage of the cool breath of the water to take off his sun-hat, mop his forehead and eat his sandwiches.

He was sitting there eating, with the stream flowing peacefully along around the horse's legs, and delicious little soft breezes playing about his bared head when just in front of him on the further bank of the ford, motionless among the faintly waving shadows, he saw another horse and rider.

The stranger was young and good-looking, so much Mr. Hotchkiss noted,

"Halloa!" called a singularly ringing voice. "Take care your horse doesn't drink too much. It's a hot day."

Mr. Hotchkiss had in fact forgotten the horse, and pulled the beast's head up forthwith.

"Thank you, thank you, my friend!" he said, again wiping his face. "It *is* hot. Can you tell me perhaps how far it is to Eagle Mountain?"

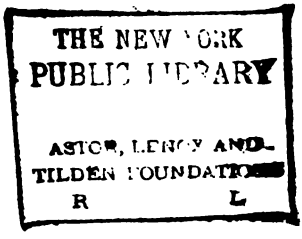
"You're at the foot of it now," said the young man. "Who are you looking for, sir?" he added with a respectful glance at the little man's clerical habit.

"A man by the name of Finney," said Mr. Hotchkiss, regarding him with an innocent and hopeful eye.

The stranger flashed him a quick look.

"Finney?" he said. "To be sure! You'd better let me be your guide, sir. I'm riding up Eagle Mountain myself, and you might miss the trail alone."

"Can you tell me how far it is to Eagle Mountain?"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CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. HOTCHKISS IN THE R LE OF MAHOMET.

Up and still up,—back and forth across the mountain's bleak side, and every time they turned their horse's heads to take the next upward grade the valley lay farther and farther below. The foothills about were wilder than any that Mr. Hotchkiss had ever seen. By degrees the trail led them around to a windy bluff that dropped sheer into emptiness on one side, with a dizzy wall on the other. The strange young man rode ahead, the broad brim of his felt hat blowing in the strong breeze. The horses lowered their heads and took the steep grade gallantly, though the clergyman's poor beast was pretty well spent by the long journey from Rosvallon.

"But surely," ventured Mr. Hotchkiss after a long time of this steady climbing, "surely,—" he called somewhat louder,—"we have come a long distance?"

The man ahead turned in his saddle and signified with a shake of his head that he could not hear.

"A—long—distance!" shouted Mr. Hotchkiss.

The man nodded indifferently, and again occupied himself with his horse and the trail.

Mr. Hotchkiss was growing unaccountably nervous. He had no specific reason for distrusting his guide, and he was a man notoriously given to faith in his fellow creatures against almost any odds. Indeed, he had that extraordinary sweet belief in the ultimate good of everyone which occasionally comes from a bad judgment in sizing up humanity. Now, however, he felt vaguely apprehensive. Of course, it was probably all right, and the strange man did not look like a thug,—indeed his glance was most open and clear,—and anyway country rectors, especially on parochial rounds, were not worth robbing (thus incoherently did the thoughts of the Reverend Mr. Hotchkiss run). *But* it was—a very long distance!

Suddenly, after a period of unusual length in which he cogitated anxiously with his eyes fixed upon his horse's ears,—he chanced to look aside and down into the gulf on his left. The depth of it made him start and shudder. And there was something affrighting in the blazing loveliness of this summer afternoon on the trail. The higher they mounted the brighter grew the sun but the colder the wind,—and the desolation was poignant. The Fear of the High Places entered into the soul of Mr. Hotchkiss; he was not used to mountains, except as observed from below, and he was feeling distinctly dizzy.

Down in the gulf that so appalled him he could see one foothill higher than the others, covered with trees. Something made him call loudly to the man in front:

"What is that hill down there?"

The man turned, glanced down, and replied without moving his head further:

"That? That's Lower Eagle Mountain."

Mr. Hotchkiss reeled in his saddle and clutched feebly at the horse's mane to steady himself. That long-suffering beast grunted in protest and stopped short. This time the strange young man riding in front turned all the way round, shifting his leg till he almost hung by his crooked knee, pulling up the while he did so. Thus nonchalantly and not ungracefully poised between the abyss and the rock wall, he said to the Reverend Mr. Hotchkiss:

"There isn't anyone on Lower Eagle that wants you, you know."

"But," said the little man, distressedly, "John Finney—"

The stranger waved his hand in airy dismissal of John Finney.

"Consider," he said, "that you've dreamed him. You might as well, for he doesn't exist."

"Doesn't exist!" Mr. Hotchkiss's world was swimming around him. His worst terrors were looming up out of the fog, changing from phantoms to ravening wolves. . . . "Who are you?" demanded Mr. Hotchkiss, trembling but valiant.

"My name," said the young man, pleasantly enough, "is Lancer Morne. You know, we'd better be moving on."

He started his horse and Mr. Hotchkiss's followed, the clerical rider permitting it mechanically because

he was, for the moment, past any individual decisive effort. When his mind cleared sufficiently to permit it, he looked behind and again reeled in the saddle. How could he ever dare to turn his horse on that narrow ledge? And then—Mr. Hotchkiss's conscientious soul spoke to him sternly. What was he thinking of? Was he actually contemplating flight now when Fate had so providentially given him an opportunity of finding out how matters stood with Anemone Breckenridge? Perish the thought! The Lord had doubtless chosen to give him this opportunity not only as a possible means of helping Anemone, but also as a further test for his sense of duty. He would embrace the opportunity, and do the duty. So, with his plump cheeks somewhat pale, he straightened himself in his saddle and rode on in silence.

Without seeming to do more than study the horizon, Lancer had a shrewd idea of what was going on in the little man's mind. Just as Mr. Hotchkiss had arrived at the determination to go ahead as bravely as might be with whatever happened to be in store for him in the Eagle's Eyrie, he saw that his guide,—or was it his kidnapper?—was smiling back at him in a singularly friendly way.

"Don't worry, sir," he said, quite respectfully. "You'll be well looked after, take my word for it."

This remarkable outlaw seemed to see nothing perculiar in asking the clergyman to take his word. More extraordinary still, Mr. Hotchkiss was sensible

of a vague feeling of relief and confidence at the promise.

"I am sure of it!" he said, eagerly. "Doubtless you require my service in your—your family?"

"That's it," said Lancer, nodding. They had now left the windier open trail on the ledge and were winding up through a belt of trees where they could ride abreast, partially sheltered from the winds.

"Ah!" said Mr. Hotchkiss, full of curiosity that rose as his fears subsided. "Not a burial, I hope?"

"No," said Lancer, "a wedding."

A thought struck Mr. Hotchkiss, and he had to speak even at the risk of offending his guide.

"Mr.—er—Mr. Morne," he said nervously but determinedly, "you must know that I, as well as Mrs. Breckenridge and Mr. Ellsworth and many others, have been deeply distressed over Miss Breckenridge's decision to stay here with you on the mountain."

Lancer stared at him blankly, but the little man hurried on: "We cannot understand it; it seems to us terrible and unnatural. If this wedding is by some chance to be contracted between her and you, let me implore you both—"

"Hold on a moment," said Lancer, breaking in. "The marriage that is to take place *is* between Miss Breckenridge and myself, but so far as her deciding to stay here of her own free will, that's nonsense. She was brought here by force, and she has been kept by force, and now I am going to marry her,—also by force, if necessary."

"But she refused to leave with Luke Ellsworth when he asked her. He says so!"

"She did!" exclaimed Lancer, frankly astounded. Then he shook his head. "I can't believe it," he said. "I think he's lying, or else there was some condition she wouldn't stand for. The long and the short of it is, Mr. Hotchkiss, that I want Anemone for my wife. I believe she cares for me; I know that I love her. I have brought you here,—by trick I admit, but it was the only way,—to marry us, and I shall make one last appeal,— the biggest I have made yet. I tell you, here and now as man to man, that if she marries me, I shall treat her as—as my sister, if that is her wish, until the day that she confesses that she loves me. But I want my chance—I can't keep her unless I marry her; well, I'm going to marry her."

Mr. Hotchkiss sat up straight, and there was a faint color in his round face.

"If you think, Mr. Morne," he exclaimed, "that you will find any minister of God willing to marry you—I do not care on what terms—to a girl without her full consent—"

Lancer turned to him with his sunniest smile.

"That's all right," he said, reassuringly. "Nobody wants you to. It's only my last chance, you see. I'm going to try to make her give her full consent."

There was silence between them for a few minutes, until, in fact, the last precipitate bit of trail leading to the rock-fortress came in view.

"Then," said Mr. Hotchkiss wondering, "you have brought me here simply on a chance?"

"That's it," said Lancer, smiling again,—but Mr. Hotchkiss thought that there were some anxious lines about his handsome mouth,—"we've cast you for Mahomet, Mr. Hotchkiss! We couldn't take the mountain to Mahomet, so we brought Mahomet to the mountain!—Steady here! This last bit is a shade ticklish. You'd better go first, but stop at the top, for you'll not be let in alone."

A minute later Mr. Hotchkiss rode, with a palpitating heart, into the stronghold of the redoubtable Mornes, and the two gaunt bloodhounds growled menacingly as he passed.

CHAPTER XXX.

ANEMONE'S REFUSAL.

A SLIGHT figure, sitting rather dejectedly on a stone, looking out over the blue valley, sprang up as the two men rode in through the portal.

Good Mr. Hotchkiss dropped his reins and waved his chubby arms excitedly.

"Anemone, my dear child!" he cried.

"Mr. Hotchkiss!" gasped the girl as though unable to believe her eyes. "Why on earth have they kidnapped *you*?"

"To marry you, my poor, poor girl," said the little clergyman.

Anemone stared at him.

"*Marry* me!" she said, a red spot flashing in each cheek. "Marry me to whom?"

But that she knew who her proposed bridegroom was to be was patent. If looks could kill Lancer would have been laid low by hers. But she recovered herself enough to greet Mr. Hotchkiss gently and sweetly. After all it really was not the good man's fault.

As Lancer drifted out of earshot for a minute, the little clergyman and she grew almost incoherent.

Lancer from a little distance saw the swift play of expression, eager and delicate, lighting up her charming face, and felt his heart, bold as it was habitually, contract with fear. Had he staked his all upon one throw only to lose? Would this final appeal, like all other appeals, fall on a closed heart? Was Anemone determined not to let herself love him? . . .

Meanwhile the other two, the little man and the girl, chattered like the children they were,—for Mr. Hotchkiss was really very much of a child in his simplicity.

They talked in the impulsive sentences invariable to impulsive people who have a great deal to communicate.

"Oh, Mr. Hotchkiss,—poor Cousin Sally! Tell me."

"Poor lady!—yes, my dear, you can imagine—"

"Of course! I've been wild. I know how anxious she must— But there didn't seem any way—"

"But, Anemone, my child, why in the world did you not—"

"Oh, you're thinking of Luke Ellsworth, Mr. Hotchkiss. That's a long story. He *was* so horrid!—"

"He has been in a state of the greatest distress."

"Well, so he should! He was the most—"

"But you don't look badly, my dear,—I am so relieved, so thankful."

"Oh, but of course! Really, considering what they are, they've been quite—"

"Of course, I suppose," whispered Mr. Hotchkiss,

looking around, "they *are* savages?"

"Oh,—as to that!" she made a gesture. "There aren't any *words*.—But how did you—"

"A bogus message, my love. They sent for me for—"

"Of course,—I might have known they—"

"And, now, you must tell me all about it!"

The brown girl, Myra, passed them, her coarse prettiness radiant by a two-fold joy,—first, because Fisher, "her man," was able to be about again, and second, because Anemone was expected to marry not him, but Lancer. She smiled at Anemone, showing her teeth white and strong like those of a healthy animal. She even felt kindly disposed toward Anemone just for the moment.

"What a dreadful-looking creature!" murmured Mr. Hotchkiss. "What a lamentable lack of refinement! Anemone! To think that you have been associated with people like these! . . . Your poor cousin! After the care with which she has brought you up!"

"After all," said Anemone rather coldly,—and most unreasonably,—"these people are Cousin Sally's own relations, you know.—Sh!—There is Mrs. Morne!" She broke off at once, as Hagar Morne came out on the doorstep of the Morne house and stood looking at them. It seemed incredible to Mr. Hotchkiss that she could be the sister of the gracious lady who had so often poured afternoon tea for him at Rosvallon. This woman with her hawk-like blue eyes, and straggling white hair was like an

elderly Valkyr,—some warrior-woman of an earlier and a lustier day.

"So you," she said, without preamble,—her voice sounded harsh and yet ringing in the high clear air,—"are the parson?"

"I am a minister of God, ma'am," asserted Mr. Hotchkiss gently.

Hagar nodded slowly.

"I can't see," she said, "how any knot could be the tighter for your tying it. You're not much as men go, or at least, you don't look it. But Lancer here has newfangled notions he picked up at college. There was no pleasing him unless he had a preacher to do the thing up in style."

Abner Morne came out, his eyes ever growing dimmer with each day now,—blinking painfully at the level rays from the sun.

Before the Mornes, Anemone was silent and stiff, as if she would not permit herself to forget for one second that they were her gaolers.

Mr. Hotchkiss was soon taken into the house for rest and refreshment by Abner Morne and his wife,—rather against their will, for they did not take kindly to clergymen, and Abner, like Hagar, thought Lancer's demand for one a mere scruple, quite superfluous for a Morne.

The moment she was alone in the clearing in front of the house with Lancer, Anemone turned on him, white with anger.

"How dared you?" she breathed, almost voiceless with the violence of her feeling. "How dared you

think that you could ever get me to consent to marry you?"

He had never looked handsomer than he did now, as he stood looking at her with the afternoon sun on his coppery hair.

"Anemone," Lancer said, "I want you for my wife,—but I don't want a wife who doesn't love me. No sane man does. If I can't make you love me in six months, I'll let you divorce me."

Her lips curled. "Divorce! Why, if we're to be divorced in six months, should we be married now? Isn't it rather a waste of time?"

"If you marry me," said the man, looking at her steadily, "I'll try not to waste the time."

The color flew to Anemone's face; self-consciousness made her unnecessarily merciless.

"I do not need six months," she said, " in which to find out that I do not—love you!"

"My dear," said Lancer, and she nearly gasped at a sort of splendid audacity in his look, "I believe that you would not find that out in sixty times six months . . . because—you love me now!"

For just a moment, she faced him speechless, then she said, quietly: "I can't talk to you any longer. It's—it's horrible to talk like this—I don't love you—I hate you, and you know it. I don't want to marry you,—I don't want ever to see you again. You tell me that you could make me love you in six months. Don't you know that I shall only hate you more?" She drew a hard, quivering breath. "If you took my hand at this moment," she said very low,

"I—think I should strike you. And you want to *marry* me!"

Lancer had lost every vestige of color while she was speaking.

"You make yourself very plain," he said, when she stopped, trembling. "Nevertheless, I want to marry you. And—I will not promise not to touch your hand,—but I will promise not to ask you to be anything but my wife in name, *until you ask it of me!*"

She looked as though he had struck her. "Until I ask!" she panted. "That is the worst insult of all."

"No," he said, "it is the biggest compliment that I can pay you,—my conviction that some day you are going to be a real woman ready for a real woman's birthright."

"Birthright!—and my birthright," she said with fierce sarcasm, "is to be you?"

"It is to be—love," said Lancer Morne simply. "Marry me on your own terms, Anemone, but marry me. Won't you give me my chance, and trust me not to take advantage of it?"

"No," said Anemone. "And if you won't let me go back with Mr. Hotchkiss I'll jump over that cliff out there."

She did not even wait for him to answer, but turned from him, and dashed blindly into the house, and up the ladder that led to her loft retreat.

Lancer watched her as she fled.

"I'm afraid I've lost!" he said aloud to the mountains, and a black loneliness fell upon him.

Anemone, deaf and breathless and unseeing, scrambled to the loft and fell upon her couch in a passion of weeping. After a while she became conscious of the rise and fall of voices below. Mr. Hotchkiss was holding forth with much impressiveness to the two older Mornes. A chance phrase which reached her ear made her sit bolt upright, forgetful of her tears. . . .

CHAPTER XXXI.

ANEMONE CHANGES HER MIND.

Mr. Hotchkiss sat uncomfortably in the bare living-room of the Morne house. His seat, one of the home-made, three-legged stools, was not a dignified perch. The fact seemed to give a malicious pleasure to Abner Morne and his wife; they, sitting also upon stools, the other side of the rough table, smiled at him without friendliness. Upon the table stood a stone jug of Abner's own white liquor which had been ironically offered to the little clergyman and refused punctiliously—though perhaps with regret, for Mr. Hotchkiss was very weary and somewhat in need of Dutch courage.

Hagar Morne, her white hair dishevelled, sat watching him in a hostile way both because he was a minister and because he was in a sense an emissary from her disloyal sister.

"Mrs. Breckenridge is naturally very unhappy about Miss Breckenridge," said Mr. Hotchkiss hesitatingly.

Abner Morne gave a chuckle of derision.

"Why doesn't she send for her then?" he de-

manded. "I reckon Sally could make out a very fair working chart of the way up Eagle Mountain. Are all the valley men cowards that she can't find anyone to bring back her girl?"

"Mrs. Breckenridge sent the Deputy Sheriff of our locality," began Mr. Hotchkiss with dignity, but both the Mornes laughed outright at that. They had heard the story, of the Deputy Sheriff's attempt,—not from Lancer but from the man Mat.

"I reckon Sally'd better get a real man next time," Hagar suggested. She was grimly enjoying the clergyman's enforced visit. She liked seeing the Church at this palpable disadvantage.

"Of course," Mr. Hotchkiss said after a moment's pause, "now that Mrs. Breckenridge knows that her cousin is being held against her own wishes she will take more drastic measures, and invoke higher and more powerful authorities to storm this—this wolf's den!" The little man was trembling with indignant excitement. "But until now, you must remember she has not been sure that Miss Breckenridge was not here of her own volition."

"Miss Breckenridge," said Lancer's mother with ironic emphasis, "hasn't that much sense. I'm surprised Sally didn't know her better!"

"Besides," added the clergyman, innocently making a decided false move, "Mrs. Breckenridge, for the girl's sake as well as her own, would not want any undue publicity given this—er—unfortunate episode."

Abner Morne's dim eyes flashed under his heavy frowning brows. "'As well as her own!'" he repeated with emphasis. "And why should she be afraid of the publicity for her own sake?"

"Why," said the rector, surprised—and he looked from one to the other of them—"Mrs. Breckenridge is a lady of—er— standing and influence. She is much respected. It would be most unpleasant for her—"

"We all know," said Hagar sharply, "that Sally Morne is ashamed of her own people,—and more shame to *her* for it, too! Sally's my own sister, and she has never sent me a message in twenty-five years."

"Nor a penny of her damned fortune!" put in Sally' brother-in-law and cousin gruffly. "We've left her alone,—do you know why? Because we were ashamed of her! Because we thought her a weak, good-for-nothing quitter. And now she's afraid to make a fuss about the girl she pretends to be fond of—because of the publicity!—Lord!"

He made a grimace of angry disgust. Mr. Hotchkiss regarded the two violent old people with earnest surprise. They were, as a matter of fact, suggesting to him an entirely new point of view. An inspiration came to him, and a pink glow of excitement began to steal into his cherubic face.

"Do I understand," he said, leaning forward, with his plump hands on his plump knees, "do I understand that you would give Anemone up for—a—er consideration?"

"*We* would," said Abner laconically, "and glad of the chance."

"Only," finished Hagar, "it's not our business. I don't reckon Lancer would. And small chance anyhow of anyone offering a—consideration!" she ended drily.

The Reverend Mr. Hotchkiss, with the elated sense of making a dramatic effect, rose to his feet.

"I think," he said,—"indeed, I am sure—I will go further and say that I am practically authorized to promise three-quarters of Mrs. Breckenridge's property to Mr. Abner Morne and his family for the return of her young cousin, Anemone."

The two stared at him a moment, and then looked at each other.

"Three-quarters!" muttered Abner, "that'd be—"

"Mrs. Breckenridge is worth about twelve thousand a year, I believe," said Mr. Hotchkiss.

Before any further word could be spoken there was a little movement behind them in the big room. Anemone had stepped quietly down the ladder and stood looking at them with her white face.

"I didn't hear much," she said breathlessly, "but—but—was it true what I thought you said—that Cousin Sally offered three-quarters of her property as a ransom for me?"

"Quite true," said Mr. Hotchkiss, troubled by something he did not understand in the girl's voice and look.

Anemone put her hand to her face quickly.

"Why," she murmured, "it would make her almost poor,—*Cousin Sally!*"

Hagar made a sort of movement as though she were going to speak, but stopped herself. Mr. Hotchkiss also had a vague feeling that Anemone did not fully understand, that he ought to be plain that this was an arrangement which was in no sense completed, that Lancer had not yet even heard of it.

Anemone's brain was whirling. Then it had been a matter of money after all! They wanted to sell her. The alternative of marriage had been a weapon to force her into consenting to be sold back to her cousin, sold back at the price of three-quarters of the Breckenridge money,—why, it was an outrage! And she had stopped Ellsworth and Philla from drugging Lancer Morne,—Lancer who could lend himself to traffic of this kind! She was only silent for a minute, but it was long enough for her to have come to a momentous decision. Cousin Sally should not be robbed of her fortune. Lancer and his parents should not succeed in their shameful deal. If she married him there could be no question of any ransom. They thought she would do anything rather than marry him; well, they were wrong; *she would marry him!* And then she would hold him to that promise he had made an hour ago, that if he had not won her love in six months after marriage, he would let her divorce him. There was another promise he had made, too. She clung to that. Without it she could never have gone through with her plan,—with it—

She raised her white face defiantly, just as Lancer himself walked quietly into the room.

"I have changed my mind," she said to him in a voice of steel and ice. "I have decided that I will marry you—today."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A MORNE BRIDE.

It was over.

The wedding had taken place, a strange, wild, rather sombre celebration in the dusty room of the Eyrie,—so Anemone always would call it now,—with barely a flash of fire upon the hearth and nothing but a dim red light upon the wall,—a sunset light that seemed indefinably melancholy. The winds wailed about the house while Mr. Hotchkiss read the service, and to Anemone who stood impassively at Lancer's side, there was something unreal and fantastic about the whole scene. These rough forms and grim faces, did they not belong among the shapes and phantasms of a world of dreams?

Mr. Hotchkiss, presented with a better horse than he had ever had in exchange for his own, (he would accept no wedding fee, though Lancer offered him the largest he had ever even heard of) had been sent down the mountain with Mat to see him safely to the bottom. He had begged not to stay for the banquet customary among the Mornes when one of the Eagle brood took a mate. So he had blessed Anemone and

gone away, leaving her still with that strange sense of being among spectres from another world.

Abner, according to an old tradition, opened the stills to the men in honor of the marriage; the "moonshine" flowed like the water it looked to be, and the house rang with laughter and loud songs until late in the night. As soon as she could, Anemone escaped from the stifling air into the freshness of out of doors. Her head ached violently. It was the only real thing in all this fantastic evening. That and her loneliness. She felt profoundly desolate. Much as she scorned the Mornes, she yet felt vaguely chagrined to feel herself so openly an alien. There was no place for her in their hearts, even though they made merry in honor of her bridal.

As she stood looking out at the rising moon, she knew though she had not heard his step, that Lancer stood beside her.

The moon,—a moon of late summer, filled with a red splendor, hung vibrant and fiery in the eastern sky. In its light the round lower mountains, the vast gorges and distant ranges showed plainly, sketched in tones of purple. The clouds, too, were purple-black, edged delicately with gold. Never had Anemone seen so radiant a night, and even the wild winds, that seem to abide by choice around the Eagle's Eyrie, had begun to grow hushed since the moon began to rise. This was a moonrise stranger and more magical than any she had known before, as much more magnificent and thrilling than that dewy moonrise down in the valley two months ago, as mar-

riage was more magnificent and thrilling than girlhood. But in Anemone's mood was no glory and quiver of passion and fulfilment. She was not a joyous, glowing bride, yielding to the splendid conquest of triumphant love; she was, on the contrary, a tense, white-faced prisoner, with ice in her veins instead of blood, and fire in her eyes instead of tender tears. She had in her, on that gorgeous wedding night, no whit of softness nor ardor. She was hard, and angry, and unloving. And if in the depth of her own nature some primal instinct of emotion strove—some unhidden recognition of the attraction which Lancer had for her, whether she would or no, she crushed the insidious bright thing down into the darkness of those unwelcome things which we will not admit even to ourselves.

"Look," Lancer said, pointing to the gleaming tranquillity of the eternal hills as they dreamed in the golden moonlight. Doesn't it seem to you that God gave us this night as a wedding gift?"

He spoke so simply, so sincerely that Anemone shrank a little. It was not part of her plan that he should be tender and uplifted and she stayed behind with her feet in the clay of sour thoughts and bitterness. It angered her that he should be touched tonight with such a magical quiet, that he should somehow have entered a reverent mood which she was far from sharing. To see his grave bright face lifted to the light wind, with the moon shining in his eyes, one would have said that this wild wedding on the hill-top

was to him the consummation of a beautiful deep dream.

From the house the men's rough voices, pitched in half a dozen discording keys, were singing one of the old hill-songs beloved to darkies, and mountaineers:

"Oh!—Ah'll drink with you,
An' Ah'll drink alone!
Ah'll drink out o' silver
Or out o' stone!
Ah'll drink when Ah'm cold,
An' Ah'll drink when Ah'm dry;
Ah'll drink with any feller
Till the day Ah die!"

The air, primitive but catching, echoed through the moonlit quiet; as it died away Lancer softly whistled it, while he gazed out across the mountains. Somehow the rude, rollicking thing was put in time with the night by that soft whistle.

Suddenly the dreaming mood seemed to leave him, and he turned to her with something new in his eyes, softened by the moon-glow, but still disconcerting.

"Do you realize," he said very low and a trifle breathlessly, "that you are my wife?"

"Yes," she said. "How long, please, do you want me to stay out here with you? I am tired."

He put out his hand and took hers into a close warm clasp. She tried to drag it away, but found she could not.

"I thought," she panted, trembling, "that you were not going to touch me. I thought—"

"Anemone! You consented—of your own free will!"

"Yes." Her tone was as icy as his was passionate. The chill of it struck through his ardent mood to his very heart. But he persisted.

"Why did you marry me, unless—you cared?"

"Didn't you tell me," she said quietly, and coldly, "that I would be—safe—from you if I married you, and free to divorce you in six months?"

"Yes," he returned bewildered, "but I thought you refused the whole proposition,—marriage, conditions and all."

"And why should you imagine when I consented to the marriage that I had not consented to the conditions?"

"I suppose," he admitted, looking at her, "that the wish was father to the thought. You can't suppose that I *like* those conditions?"

"I should think you would," said Anemone. "I should think it must be rather horrible to be married to a woman who detests you."

"So should I," said Lancer steadily. The moonlight hid the pallor of her face, and his voice betrayed neither hurt nor anger. "But, Anemone, you do not—detest—me!"

"Do I not?" she said with a low laugh, full of contempt and bitterness.

Again the men inside the Eyrie, still busy with the

unwonted privilege of late hours and unlimited drink, broke out in another stanza:

"Ah'll drink with mah gal
When Ah give her the ring,
Ah'll drink with the parson,—
An' Ah'll drink with the king!
Ah'll drink with the jedge,
When mah term is done,
An' Ah'll drink with Mistah Dead Man
When mah time is run!"

They caught up a rude chorus and it swelled till a night bird, perched on a crag above the Eyrie, flew, crying, downward into the dimness beyond the cliff.

"When mah term is done,—
Ah'll drink—Ah'll drink—
Ah'll drink with the Jedge,
When mah term is done,—
Ah'll drink with the Jedge,—
An' Ah'll drink right well!
When mah term is done,—
Ah'll drink—Ah'll drink—
Ah'll drink with Mistah Dead Man—
Ah'll drink in heaven,
Or Ah'll drink in hell!"

In the hot golden moonlight, Lancer caught her suddenly into his arms. His face bent above her; she could see that it was drawn and colorless,—even the dream-glow could not hide the haggard look of it.

For a moment she was sure that he was going to kiss her and every drop in her body seemed to stand still in its course. The moment was, in its suspension of everything in her, the most violent she had ever known. As drowning people know a thousand memories so in that instant she experienced a thousand emotions. . . . In the midst of her still turmoil she knew that she was waiting with her whole being for the pressure of his lips upon hers. He leaned closer, and she closed her eyes,—but in instinctive defiance. Every muscle in her body was as rigid as iron in spite of the involuntary yielding of her spirit.

And with the vehemence of his outraged passion Lancer pushed her from him.

"I'll keep my word somehow," he said thickly, "but before God, you're a woman of stone. You're my wife,—you're mine—and I don't even kiss you. And you don't know what that means. Damn your coldbloodedness," said the Man, hardly knowing what he said; "you don't even know what it means!"

He left her abruptly; a cloud passed across the face of the moon, and a wind began to rise, sighing.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ANOTHER MORNING IN THE MOUNTAINS.

It seemed to Anemone at first that six months was an eternity of existence to be forced to look forward to. How, she asked herself, could she endure the Mornes and the mountains for nearly two hundred days? But time, which can teach almost anything, can even teach us how to spend it in the speediest and fullest way, and to Anemone's great surprise she woke one morning to find that nearly four months had gone, and that the winter was already in the wind that blew in at her little open window.

She lay still, wondering what had happened to the time. It seemed only last week that she had sullenly determined to make the best of it, and endure her exile as best she might. In this ungracious spirit she had started her new life as daughter-in-law of the Morne house. Hagar had no love for her, but from the day that she was Lancer's wife she paid her the compliment of consulting her, discussing with her, and treating her as though she were in very truth a Morne woman. At first Anemone had very uncordially received the older woman's grudging over-

tures. She was not interested in the affairs of the Mornes and did not pretend to be.

But after a while she found a sort of interest growing in spite of herself. The flood of strength and health which was streaming into her, raised her spirits against her will, and set the edge upon her life,—gave flavor to the loneliness, and an element of excitement to the passing days. Unwillingly, ungratefully, almost unknowingly, Anemone was becoming charged with the joy of life, and she could not help finding pleasure in things, however determined she might be to be bored, disagreeable and gloom-ridden.

But she would not give in with a good grace to the sense of well-being that sent her blood dancing through her veins, brightened her eyes, and gave her such a zest for existence. She was still cruelly and stubbornly anxious to hurt Lancer, and she knew she could find no surer means of making him miserable than to let him feel day in and day out that she was merely counting the days until, according to his promise, he must set her free. Yet every day some new wonder unfolded before her and was transmitted into an element of life itself, entered into her blood,—vivifying her whole being, soul and body alike.

Winter, the fierce white war-lord, was coming in across the mountains in a chariot of ice. Before his path the winds heaped the spoils of the vanquished summer,—dead leaves and faded flowers. And in his honor the woods flamed in sheets of leafy fire against

the sky,—the funeral pyres whereon Time burned the green luxuriance of the warm and fragrant months that now were past. About the earth still lingered that strange fragrance of autumn which is like a ghost of scent,—the breath of rose-leaves now faint and dead; the perfume of forgotten twilights, and dewy dawns gone by. There are a few mild days in the late fall when, in the mountains especially, Nature takes out her souvenirs and fingers them softly till the odors of summer and romance, like lavender and cedar in a drawer, saturate the air and lightly arouse the imagination. But this time was passing swiftly. Already there had been snow, and heavier storms were brooding not far away.

Anemone as a member, even if unfledged, of the clan and immune, by a code of honor rigorous and archaic, from all suspicion of treachery, was permitted to hear the business of the Mornes discussed openly. She was even allowed to witness the actual work in the distillery, and listen to the plans for the sale of the liquor. There was no attempt at making secrets of the procedure of distribution. Lancer's wife knew there were certain hollow trees and rock caverns which were utilized as God-given bars by the people of the hills and valleys alike. A rude system of honor prevailed in this; a man left a certain sum of money, discreetly hidden from prying or officially legal eyes; when he returned he would find the spirituous equivalent of his deposit awaiting him,—and no half-measure, either. Or, supposing that a man were hard put to it for the moment. He left a conditional

I. O. U. in the hollow stump or the appointed hole in the rock; he agreed, in short, to pay for his portion of the white liquor, when he could. There was, far down the mountain, a tree with a birch bark sign: "Apples For Sale." To the initiated this meant Apple Jack. There was the same large confidence evinced in a stone jug that invariably answered his appeal. From time to time the moonshiners were cheated. But it is creditable to add that even when they were cheated, they refused to benefit by the experience. To their thinking worldly wisdom was a thing not worth buying, whether at a high or low price, and they never failed to trust men in general simply because they had learned that men in particular were sometimes not to be counted on. Anemone grew to respect this in them.

Her relations with Lancer remained unchanged. He had kept his word rigorously, but she knew he loved her to madness. So far as she was concerned, however, with the growth and development within her, Anemone had become not more but less vulnerable. Her strengthening power to resist had kept pace with the ungauged possibilities in her which made resistence necessary. Over and over again her quickening blood warned her of danger; over and over again she steeled herself against it. Anemone was of the race of women in whom sex antagonism is strongly developed. They are the most violently passionate eventually, but the winning of them must be long and daring. They are the real primitive women of the earth, the guerdon of bow-and-spear physical

prowess, but the most exquisitely ardent love-mates in the world when they are once fairly won.

There were times when Anemone ached to let some unexpressed part of her nature have voice; when the sudden sight of Lancer, bare-headed and bare-armed in the sun, every muscle playing splendidly under the smooth, golden-brown skin, gave her a quick strange thrill. There were moments when the unexpected sound of his voice caused her blood to move slower or swifter through her veins.

And whenever she experienced these disconcerting and treacherous sensations, she raised a fresh barrier between him and the unexplored self within her before which she occasionally found herself nonplussed.

And all this was going on while she and Lancer lived side by side each day, probably with no one save Lancer's own parents realizing that they were not truly husband and wife.

When she looked out she saw that more snow was falling, light and feathery from the cold, gray sky. No wonder the air had chilled her! This time it was real snow, and a snowy sky. Winter was really upon them at last. Never had she seen so dreary-looking a world as that which she looked on from her high and tiny casement. She recalled the first time she had gazed out of that window,—and the fairy ocean of mist she had viewed bright under the morning sun. To-day there was no mist in the valley; all the vapor seemed to have been drawn high up into the sky. And there were no puffs of cloud scudding before

the wind; the heavens were swathed in a vast gray winding sheet, and the winds were piercing cold and sang a song of death and desolation. She could hear Hagar moving about getting breakfast, and she began to dress huriedly, shivering at the cold air.

Hagar was a never-ending source of wonder to Anemone. Not a week went by that she was not sent for to help someone die or give birth, and she always answered the summons.

One day word came to the Eyrie that Mat, Lancer's most loyal adherent, and the jolliest and best-hearted of all the clan followers, had been hurt. An early frost had made the turf slippery and his horse had fallen. The man's leg had been badly crushed and his companions were afraid to bring his home. Hagar had straightway put on a heavy coat and riding boots and ridden down the mountainside in the bitter October night to look out for him. This was only one of the errands of succor and ministration about which the iron woman went forth.

This morning when Anemone got downstairs she found her mother-in-law, dressed for riding, looking through her stock of medicines.

"There's coffee on the fire," she said by way of greeting. "I'm off for all day and all night likely enough."

"Who is it?" asked Anemone, for she was accustomed to these sudden calls for Hagar.

"A darky woman in childbirth," said Mrs. Morne briefly.

"A darky! But there's going to be a snowstorm!"

"The baby won't wait for the snowstorm and I can't either," said Hagar rather grimly. Then she paused and glanced at the girl. "I reckon I see what you mean now," she said. "You think it's funny to go out of one's way for a coon. Well, maybe it is. But *I've had babies myself* and I reckon it feels pretty much the same, whatever color you are."

She departed forthwith with no further commentary.

While Anemone was eating breakfast Lancer came in. He was white and restless and there was a stubborn look about his mouth that belied the appeal of his eyes.

"Will you come for a walk?" he said.

"Why,—it's snowing!" said Anemone.

He made an impatient gesture—and a little ashamed of her objection, she said quickly, "I don't mind the snow. I'll come."

"Thank you."

They climbed the high rock that loomed above the Eyrie. The snow fell softly in large scattered flakes, the wind was chill but not yet violent. When they had reached the highest pinnacle and seemed somehow to be above the whole vast world, within reaching distance of God Himself, Lancer turned and faced her, breathing quickly. For a minute he looked at her, her young little body braced against the breeze, her eyes clear. . . .

"I'm going to break my word," he said. He was deadly white and his eyes had black shadows beneath them. "I am going to make one last demand upon your—womanhood. I am going to ask for—my—wife."

Anemone's heart stopped beating, and then raced forward again. It was a strange moment,—the snowflakes that fell about them, whirled lightly by the wind, gave an air of unreality to everything. She had the sensation of one who hears and sees in a half-waking dream.

She did not look at him as she answered:

"Since you have broken the agreement, I will do so, too. I want to be—set free—before the six months are up."

"Set free?"

"Yes. I want to go back to Rosvallon. If you demand a ransom—"

"Ransom! What are you talking about?" he exclaimed, frowning as he stared at her.

"There was a proposition to send me back for a ransom," said Anemone coldly. This in fact had been the unpardonable, the intolerable thing to her. This was the insult that, she told herself, she never could or would forgive. But there was no doubt that Lancer himself was frankly astonished. She told him what she had overheard, and his frown deepened. A flush spread darkly over his face.

"And you have believed *that* of me!" he exclaimed, a flame in his eyes, as he looked at her. "You have

believed that I would have given you up for money! . . . Why, girl,—there isn't money enough in the world to buy you from me. It's been worth a dozen fortunes to have you here these months, even under these—these damnable conditions!" Lancer clenched his hands; he seemed controlling himself by an effort. "But it's getting too much for me. I'm through. It's been sort of mad happiness to see you, to hear you speak, to watch you become stronger and lovelier each day, and to dream of—what I still kept hoping and believing would come true sometime. But it's been an agony, too. You can't understand that. You aren't human enough to understand how a man can thirst and hunger till he nearly goes mad. . . . But I've come to the end. I can't bear it any longer. I love you, and I want you for my wife. I thought when I kept you here away from that silly cramped atmosphere, you'd been brought up in, that I was giving you a chance to become a real woman. Well, you're not a woman, and you never will be. You're a pretty, cold, heartless child, and that's what you're cut out for, I guess,—not for love and marriage and the big things. You're the sort of woman who probably thinks nature is coárse!"

He stopped, and drew his hand across his forehead. "I'm talking like a maniac," he muttered hoarsely,—"and you don't know even what I mean; it isn't in you to understand."

He turned and looked at her again, full in the eyes.

"You're free," he said, "I want a woman for a wife,—not a child nor a mist-maiden, but a flesh and blood woman who will give me her love. You can go back to Rosvallon as soon as you like."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SNOW.

ALL that day the snow fell; by nightfall the light feathery flakes had given place to a fine dust-like snow that whirled in an ever increasing wind straight from the cold northeast.

"It's going to be a bad one," said Fisher as he brought in a quantity of wood for the great fire which in this weather was never allowed to go out, night or day. He rarely spoke to Anemone and she was surprised that he did so now. The reason followed.

"So you're going to clear?" he said with his sly little eyes on her.

"Yes," said Anemone.

"Say," he remarked, dropping his voice, and sidling a little closer, "I reckon they're still wanting old Abner?" Fisher never referred to his uncle by any more respectful title than this. Since the thrashing he had from Lancer, he had been surlier than ever,—and it took no great perception to see that he nursed a grudge against all his cousin's branch of the family.

"I suppose so," assented Anemone, wondering what he was driving at.

"Well," said Fisher, in the same stealthy way, "if they want a fellow to show 'em the way up when they come to nab him,—you understand?"

"You'd betray your own clan?" exclaimed Anemone incredulously. It seemed to her a shameful and unbelievable thing that any man could be so treacherous. Philla had been bad enough, but somehow women never expect the same quality of loyalty of women that they do of men, and are not so shocked by their breaking faith.

"Sure I would," said Fisher Morne, and he showed his broken yellow teeth in a snarl like that of a vicious dog. "There is no love lost between them and me. And if the old man's nabbed there'll be a bit of money to divide up. I know where it's hidden."

"I see," said Anemone, looking at him in disgust. "And what do you think—your cousin—" she never could mention Lancer's name—"will be doing while you are dividing his father's money?"

"The boys'll keep him from bothering," said he malevolently. "They're getting sick of his damned high-handed ways anyhow—and so are you, I reckon." He grinned at her with a friendliness which made her loathe him.

"What have you been telling me all this for?" she exclaimed. "You know very well I shall have to warn him."

"Warn him,—you?" The man's astonishment was

absolutely genuine. "But surely you aren't any friend to him, are you?"

"No," said Anemone. "But I'm married to him."

"Not much you aren't!" said Fisher rather coarsely. "If you were, he'd never let you go the way he's doing."

"Did he tell you I was going?" said Anemone hesitatingly.

Fisher shook his head. "No," he rejoined. "But I heard him telling Mat to get Breeze saddled the first thing tomorrow morning if the snow let up. 'It's for Mrs. Morne,' says he. 'Will your mother be starting off so soon? She isn't even back yet,' says Mat. 'It's for my wife,' says Lancer and turned round and walked off. The boys are all talking about it. Couldn't stand the life here, could you?"

Anemone did not answer. She hated the man and his confident assumption that in leaving Lancer she was ranging herself on the side of Lancer's enemies, stirred up in her a resentment which she would have found it difficult to classify or explain. There was much in her attitude of mind to-day which she found disconcerting and hard to understand. This morning, on the windy crag, with that veil of fluttering snow making the mountains ghostly, she had felt that she must get away, that the situation was impossible, insupportable,—that she would die if she were kept a prisoner longer. When Lancer had turned upon her with that amazing arraignment of her as no true woman she had been shocked to find a sort of rage of resentment waking in her—a

passionate wish to right herself in his eyes, to prove herself—even if she was never to see him again,—a veritable woman. Why had she felt a need to vindicate herself, when the right was all on her side and Lancer from first to last had been the aggressor, subjecting her to the indignity of captivity and exile? . . . Yet, she had felt the need of clearing herself, and had in fact turned quickly toward him with a fire in her look which had made him catch his breath and ask himself if it was possible that after all, and at the eleventh hour— But the self which had been uppermost all her life,—the artificial self which is the last barrier to give way in a highly civilized woman, especially a highly civilized young girl,—restrained her just as she was about to speak. She said nothing, but set her lips firmly and the animation went out of her exquisite little face, leaving it as pale and cold and inflexible as before.

Lancer had kept away from her all day. No further word had been said about her departure. She knew that he would not let her start from the Eyrie while the snow was falling. The trails were very treacherous and dangerous in snow, and the prospect of a blizzard quite possible even though it was still early in the winter. She had walked up and down the big room feverishly, going to the door every five minutes to see whether the storm was letting up. She hoped her mother-in-law would not come back till late the next day. She dreaded having to see her again before she left. If only she could steal away with no last words to anybody! What a coward she

was! She thought impatiently—and what was the matter with her anyway? *Why was she not happier?* There in fact lay the puzzle and it was getting her deeper and deeper into a web of bewilderment. She had been wanting to get away from the Mornes for months, and now she was going. She should have been singing for joy. As a matter of fact the gray skies and howling winds outside were not more depressed and dreary than her thoughts.

Twilight had shut down and the light from the big fire seemed to glare out the more ruddily in the dimness. Old Abner came in with a heavy step, stamping the snow from his long rubber boots. He sat down by the fire, and stared into it anxiously. His failing sight gave him an odd appearance nowadays of always peering,—like some great bird thrusting its head forward in search of prey.

"It's going to be a bad storm," he said, frowning. "I wish Hagar was home."

Anemone had never heard the faintest word of affection between Abner and his wife, but she knew that the old man was very proud of Hagar and very dependent on her. It flashed across her mind that Hagar, with her rough, almost masculine ways, her harsh oaths and violent temper, was yet nearer to Lancer's idea of what a true woman should be than Anemone herself. There was humor in her thought, but it was a humor that hurt her a trifle. She recommenced her restless pacing of the room. The old man sat and peered at the fire, the wind howled ever louder and more drearily and the piercing cold came

in at every crack in spite of the mighty logs blazing on the hearth.

The door opened a second time to admit Lancer. He was dressed for riding with a cap pulled low over his ears. He went over to the shelf, took down a brown jug of home-distilled liquor, filled a leather-covered pocket flask from it, and put it in his pocket.

"Any coffee ready?" he asked abruptly.

Anemone almost mechanically went and got him the coffee from the pot in the cook-house next door. It was the first thing that she had ever done for him, and he took it with a curiously grave "thank you."

"You're not going down?" said his father, peering at him anxiously. The Mornes always spoke of leaving their stronghold as "going down."

"I'm going after mother," said Lancer brusquely. "She may try to come back alone, and the storm will be getting worse all night."

"I'm glad," said Abner with no further comment on Lancer's project. "She'd likely enough start by herself if the woman didn't need her. She's afraid of nothing."

"She's a brave woman, doing a woman's work," said Lancer, setting down the empty coffee-cup. He left with no further word and not a look in his wife's direction.

Anemone had never hated Hagar Morne as much as she did then!

For some reason nobody felt like going to bed that night. The men sat about the fire and smoked,

drank and told stories till far into the night,—all except Mat who had gone with Lancer. Their stories were mostly about snowstorms and snow-slides; of men carried off their feet by avalanches and flung into crevasses; of horses buried in snow and only found again, a heap of bones, when the spring came. It gave Anemone a strange feeling, as though she were living in some old book of adventure. It had never occurred to her that men really did brave the elements at such tragic risks,—and in peaceful Virginia, too! She listened breathlessly, and after a while she found that another element was creeping into the interest which she felt. Was it—could it be anxiety? Was that what was the matter with her: was she anxious about Lancer?

By degrees the men became more and more silent. Some of them dozed, but still no one made a move to go to their bunks and shakedowns. Vaguely a sense of apprehension was stealing into the big room along with the bitter penetrating cold. . . . After a while Anemone fell asleep, sitting on a fur rug and leaning against the side of the fireplace. . . . She awoke with a start to find Abner putting more wood on the fire. The room was very cold and still save for the howling clamor of the wind outside. It was almost morning.

"No news?" she said.

The old man shook his head. . . . There was despair in his peering eyes.

There was no news all that day, and the snow and wind kept on till the Eyrie was banked in drifts

and the trail looked about as navigable as a toboggan slide. Anemone and Myra hardly dared to go out of the house. They were literally afraid of being blown over the side of the cliff. Myra cooked the morning and midday meals for the men, and Anemone helped her,—also for the first time, for Hagar had not invited assistance in her cook-house.

And then, with the dusk,—the cold, snow-swept twilight,—came a man on foot, lame, gasping, with his coat torn and his hat lost. He staggered through the stone entrance and fell in a heap in front of the doorstep of the Morne house.

Abner and Anemone rushed to him. It was Mat, and he was fainting from cold and exhaustion.

"It was a slide," he panted. "The old lady's badly hurt, I got her into a cave, but I couldn't bring her up. I was too weak."

"And Lancer?" said Lancer's father.

Mat sobbed aloud. "Gone down a ravine with ten foot of snow on top of him," he muttered unsteadily. "I couldn't save him, and now,—God help me,—I'll never see him again!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE AWAKENING.

It was thus bitterly that Anemone's awakening came. For in the moment that she heard of his death she knew that she loved him—had loved him from the beginning. Lancer had known it and felt it with every instinct. Because of his knowledge of it, and in spite of her own wilful blindness to it, he had dared to hold her in spite of herself, even to marry her in the faith that one day she would learn herself and know that she did love him as a real woman loves a man. She could now understand many things that before had been simply bewildering or annoying. She could even in a measure understand herself.

They brought Hagar home late that night. The snow had mercifully ceased, and a gang of half-a-dozen men worked for hours getting the trail clear. Anemone and Myra had made such preparations as they could. As yet they could not tell what the woman's injuries had been. Anemone had urged their carrying her down instead of up the mountain, to some hospital or doctor in the valley. But old Abner was obstinate. She must *come home* first, to

her own wild nest that she knew and loved. Later they would get all the doctors in the world if she needed them. So Hagar came home, carried by rough but not ungentle hands and was laid down on a great pile of blankets and skins such as Lancer had heaped for Anemone that first night. She had gone down with her horse and had been badly crushed. Both legs were paralyzed and one arm was evidently sprained seriously. But her hawk-like blue eyes were as fierce and keen as ever and her spirit uncrushed until she heard that Lancer had been killed.

Physical pain, exposure, weakness could not quench her courage. But the news of her son's death wiped the life off her face as a sponge wipes writing off a slate. She stared in unbelieving despair at the faces near her, then her eyes closed and she remained rigidly unconscious for many hours. When she came to herself she either could not or would not talk. She uttered no word of complaint, lamentation or question. Whether the strain and shock combined had really paralyzed her power of articulation they did not know. She simply stopped speaking, and sat like a stone woman, looking at nothing. Yet the old light came back now and then to her eyes, and she seemed often on the very verge of an outburst, an outburst which, however, never came.

Anemone took care of her devotedly. The older woman often looked at her fiercely, as though she resented help from her daughter-in-law with every fibre of her crushed body. But someone had to look

out for her, and Myra had her hands full cooking for the men.

Anemone lived out those days in a blackness deeper than anything she had ever imagined. She had learned that she loved her husband, and had lost him in the same moment.

Lancer was dead. He had gone from her, strong and splendid and young,—the handsomest man on earth it seemed to her as she remembered him,—and now he was lying at the foot of a ravine, covered deep, deep with the cruel snow. There was something solemn and terrible in that white burial in some far still mountain place,—something that made a lesser funeral seem a trivial thing. For Lancer, the eagle, —and son of an eagle brood—was to be no sordid panoply of grief,—no mourning weeds nor churchly service,—no dreary interment among other narrow sepulchres. For him was the great mausoleum of the snow, and the dirge of the winds that had loved him.

There seemed something irreverent, something jarring in recalling now the passions that had swayed him, even so lately as yesterday. And yet it was that human memory of him that walked with Anemone and punished her a hundred times for every pang of pain that he had endured at her heedless hands. He had loved her, desired her, waited for her,—and he was dead. She had had this glowing treasure of love laid at her feet and she had turned away from it. And now it was too late. There was no passion in the blue bright eyes now,—no heat in that young and

riotous blood. He was cold as the snow itself was cold,—and she might long for him as a woman longs for a man, till her hair was gray and her own blood slow, but she could never again feel his kiss or his hand. A line went beating through her head,—not particularly apt in content,—but maddeningly insistent, "He's sleeping out and far to-night." . . . It went on and on in her head. "*He's sleeping out and far to-night. . . . He's sleeping out and far to-night,*" till it seemed as though she would go mad, with the monotony of it, and the horror of the picture it made. "*He's sleeping out and far to-night.*" . . . She pressed her hands to her temples, trying not to cry out with the pain that wrung her. Her eyes were big and staring, but she had not even wanted to cry. The men looked at one another and muttered that "it was plain she'd had no use for him," and that "she must have a damned stony heart not to even be able to work up a tear for the man." She knew that such must be the point of view of everyone. If they knew—if they only knew. . . .

She went to get a bowl of broth and brought it to Mrs. Morne. The older woman, however, turned away her face with just a glance of hate. Anemone knew that Lancer had started on the up trail with his mother. Doubtless he had told her that his wife had given up the experiment and was going to leave the Eyrie. And that was the reason why she would not even accept food from the hand of her son's widow. . . . Anemone called quietly to Myra who was hurrying through the room.

"Myra, will you see if Mrs. Morne will take the broth from you?"

With a look of surprise Myra took up the bowl. Hagar drank the liquor willingly.

Anemone went into the cook-house and began mixing corn-bread. Myra had shown her how. The brown girl came in after a moment with the empty bowl.

"Say," she blurted out, throwing it into a pan of water. "I—I've got something on my mind, and I reckon I'd better spit it out. . . ." She hesitated and looked about as though to be sure that no one could overhear them. It was a sparkling crystal night, now that the snowstorm had been blown by. The stars spangled the sky with silver and the air was keen and prickly with frost.

"What's the matter?" asked Anemone, for she saw that Myra was really troubled.

"It's like this," the other said in a low vehement tone. "I hate a dirty deal, and I think they're planning one."

"Who?"

"All of 'em,—all of those damned rats that are so ready to clear out when they think there's nothing more in it for them."

"The men?"

"Yes,—the gang. You see, they've always had someone to lead 'em, but old Abner's too near blind, and now Lancer's gone.—Anyhow, I reckon they're going to tie up to my man."

"Fisher?"

"Yes, and that's fair enough,—only—" Myra spoke unwillingly, as though the words were forced from her in spite of herself—"only Fisher's got some ideas that are—funny." She paused.

"How funny?" But already the answer had flashed across Anemone's mind in a quick recollection of her talk with Fisher when he was bringing in the wood.

"There's some money belonging to the old man," said Myra in a voice that was almost inaudible, "and Fisher's made those fellows think that they've a right to a share of it. Fisher knows where it is, and they're going to take it to-night."

"How shameful!" exclaimed Anemone. "But surely Abner Morne—"

"He's pretty nearly helpless now," Myra said. "He couldn't put up any fight. The old woman would have been stiff to tackle; she can pack and pull a gun with any man. But *she's* out of business. The only thing old Abner can do is to hide the money somewhere else, or divide up and keep in with the gang. Hush! Take care!"

She shook her head warningly as a heavy step tramped by in the darkness.

When the man was again out of earshot, the girls exchanged one further question and answer:

"Do you know where the money is hidden?" asked Anemone in a brisk and business-like tone which surprised herself as well as Myra.

"Behind a loose brick in the chimney on the left side of the fireplace," said Myra.

Anemone said nothing more, but carried a platter of smoked meat and stew into the big room. A plan, wilder than her wildest dreams hitherto, was forming in her mind.

Lancer, the eagle, was gone, his Eyrie was at the mercy of marauders,—unless the eagle's mate should enter the fight? . . . Lancer had said that she was no true woman. Would she be able to prove to him even across the barriers of death that she could take his place and fight for that which was his? Had she the power to become truly worthy to be the eagle's mate?

Old Abner spoke to Anemone a little later. Evidently something which he had been waiting to say had been weighing on him. The man was suddenly bent and shattered with age. The two-fold blow which had come to him with such appalling suddenness had seemed to crumple up the manhood which up to now had resisted time and infirmity and made him a figure of notable force and power. Now all that was left was a broken ruin of what had once been a strong and masterful man.

"I've been thinking," he said to Anemone, speaking very slowly, "that you'll want to be getting home. I know Lancer was going to send you as soon as the weather was settled. If it's clear to-morrow I reckon the trail will be in fair shape. You'd better start early."

"Thank you," said Anemone quietly, "but I think I'll not go, just yet."

He looked at her in a puzzled way, then his peering gaze wandered back to the fire.

It was an hour after supper when, according to what was a preconceived plan, two of the Morne's followers came quietly up to the old man, who had eaten little and had crept away again to the fire, and each laid a hand on his arm. Abner looked up at them and struggled to his feet. The men glanced at Fisher for further instructions. Myra gave a little gasp, and Anemone knew that the time had come. The rats had turned.

"It's all right, Uncle Abner," said Fisher. He sauntered over and looked at the older man with a grin. "The boys won't hurt you."

Abner took an impatient step forward only to find himself in a vise-like grip on each side.

"You might as well take it peaceful," said Fisher with what he doubtless believed to be a soothing inflection. "Every man's day has got to end sometime, and yours has been a mighty long one."

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded Abner Morne. His big muscles strained against this restraint, but he would not give them the satisfaction of seeing him rage or struggle.

"Nothing,—nothing at all," Fisher assured him. "Just keep you from over-exerting yourself and doing something foolish that you'd be sorry for later on."

"What?" said Abner. "What do you want to do that you've got to tie me up while you do it?"

"We're just going to settle that little matter of the money," said Fisher with a grin.

"What money?" But the veins in the old man's forehead were beginning to swell.

By way of an answer Fisher, still grinning amiably, took a step in the direction of the fireplace.

"Mat," he said, "take your knife and scrape the cracks out around the eighth brick."

Before he could finish his directions there was a bellow of rage from old Abner. He roared curses as he writhed in the grasp of the two men who were holding him, and stout fellows though they were they found it no easy job.

"Go ahead, Mat," said Fisher in a lull.

"I'll be damned if I do," said Mat sturdily.

Fisher's little eyes flamed. "I'll kill you if you don't!" he blustered.

"You will not," said Mat calmly. "I'm leaving this place anyhow. The man *I* followed and would have followed as far as hell and back, is gone. There's no place for me here. I've always lived a man's life,—I've lived rough, but I've lived clean. I'm not going to start robbing old people at this stage in the game."

He turned on his heel and walked away from the fireplace.

Fisher glared after him, but seemed, with a shrug of his shoulders, to dismiss him and his insubordination as not worth bothering about. He now took out his own clasp knife, and strolled with leisurely strides over to the big chimney.

"Now, boys," he said, "We'll see—"

He stopped short, silenced by the most paralyzing surprise of his life.

From the shadows at the left of the chimney came a slim figure. A pair of cool bright gray eyes met his,—and something else just below them. It was the round dark muzzle of a revolver which with a perfectly steady hand Anemone Morne was pointing at his head.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LANCER MORNE'S WIFE.

"LANCER is dead," said Anemone in a very clear, low, steady voice,—it is possible that she had never spoken his name before. "But Lancer's widow is living. I am going to learn how to take his place."

If Fisher had not been a coward at heart he might have laughed or blustered, but the revolver barrel was rather close and disconcerting. It is unreasonable to expect a man to keep his sense of values when he is looking into a gun. Even the inappropriateness and absurdity of the thing won't keep a pistol from going off when a nervous hand is pressing the trigger. Anyway, Fisher fell back a step, and in precisely the time that it took him to make that single backward step, Anemone won the favor of the other men. The Morne clan and their adherents loved the master hand. They might be punished by it occasionally, and they might snap at it in turn, but they were a people who must be led by someone, and they respected, on general principles and under all conditions, the person who pulled a gun at the

psychological moment. Also, they were childlike and primitive souls and they liked their melodrama raw and neat like their whiskey. Burly Mat, standing at the door where he had been halted by Anemone's spectacular appearance, was the first to voice the revulsion of feeling.

"Look here, boys!" he cried. "I say we don't meddle with what don't belong to us! And three cheers for Lancer Morne's wife!"

The men cheered her boisterously, as quickly turned against their whilom leader as if they had in truth been children. Fisher retreated, frowning in rage and humiliation and Anemone, satisfied now that the danger was over, lowered the revolver. It was at Lancer's mother that she had looked in that moment and at last she saw something in the fierce eyes that was neither hate nor scorn. Almost for the first time since Anemone had known her, Hagar smiled.

Fisher disappeared that night, and Myra with him. The girl came to Anemone, cried a little, muttered something incoherent about "wishing her luck," and fled without vouchsafing any further explanation. In the morning man and girl had vanished and with them two of the best horses the Mornes had.

Abner and the other men were bitterly angry. Anemone was more apprehensive than enraged. She remembered what Fisher had said to her concerning his willingness to guide the officers to the Eyrie if they wished it. She felt sure that he would be doubly

ready to do so now that she had ignominiously defeated him before the men he was proposing to lead and control. A short time ago she would have said that it could not really matter to her whether or not the Sheriff recaptured Abner and broke up the Morne clan. But at this later day it mattered to her vitally. She was herself a Morne now, and must rise or fall, live or die with them. The strange half-savage sense of race-pride and race-loyalty which animated Abner and Hagar and had worked in Lancer so strongly that it had drawn him back into the wilderness at last, became understandable and sympathetic to Anemone in the clearer and larger vision of her awakening. She was not of the tribe by birth, but through Lancer and her newly recognized love for him she sensed the tribal bond and obligation. She knew that, if necessary, she would fight like an eagle herself for the Eyrie and the liberty it stood for.

Anemone was changing. Daily, almost hourly and yet with the sure and delicate gradations only possible to Nature, the Chief of Artisans, Anemone's whole self was being altered. The fragile and wistful charm which had whispered of youth and sentiment and things virginal and yet romantic, had given place to something deeper and more radiant. In a week she had become a woman now, whose daily companions were Sorrow and Loneliness and Regret, but she did not look like an unhappy woman. In spite of the real sadness that looked out from her big Celtic eyes, she found a strange still joy in living

Lancer's life, and doing Lancer's work. To her the men deferred at first half jokingly but afterwards because her advice had been worth taking. She learned something about distilling and suggested ways of treating more directly with certain dealers who bought the "moonshine." She confessed that she thought it a horrid business, but as long as that was what the Mornes were used to doing they might as well do it properly. She was not given to self-analysis or she might have been somewhat startled to find how full-fledged had grown her sense of antagonism to the restraint of law, order and civilization. She did not argue about it; she simply ranged herself, sympathies and all, on the side of her husband, and because he had not liked civilization she did not like it, either. He had been an outlaw; she would be an outlaw, too.

And a very real source of comfort to her was the change in Hagar's feelings for her. The fierce, speechless old woman sat watching her with a curious look as she moved about her. She no longer minded having her daughter-in-law do things for her. Indeed, she seemed to be better satisfied when it was Anemone's hand that turned her pillow or poured her coffee. Neither love nor gratitude could ever be read in her gaze, but there was growing in it some emotion akin to one or the other. Anemone knew that it was because she was trying, as she had said, to take Lancer's place,—trying to be a fit mate for the eagle that would not fly again.

A fortnight had passed by since Spencer's death and Fisher's disappearance. Anemone had gone out to feed the dogs when she heard horses on the trail,—many horses.

The men had not "gone down" that day. They were most of them working at the still. Then the approaching horses could only be those of enemies,—for the Mornes had no visitors. She thought of Fisher,—and went quietly to look for Mat,—her most faithful henchman.

It was a clear, quiet winter day. The snow still covered the hills, but the sun was bright and the wind less piercing than usual.

Three minutes later Fisher Morne came in through the rock-gate that guarded the Mornes' stronghold. He spoke to the dogs, who knew him, and, turning, said over his shoulder:

"It's all right, come along. We're there."

Behind him rode a posse of twenty men, including Luke Ellsworth and headed by the Sheriff of the county. This time they were going to "clean up the Mornes."

It was the Sheriff that walked up to the door of the Eyrie. He was a fat, pink-faced man, more muscular than he looked and miraculously quick with a gun.

A slight and exceedingly pretty girl met him. She was dressed in a rough black woolen dress, and her hair was as black as the stuff. Her face was delicately browned by sun and wind, but her eyes showed sleeplessness and sorrow.

"How do you do?" she said, exhibiting no surprise. "And who do you want to see?"

"Who's the boss here?" said the Sheriff.

"I am," said Anemone.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE POSSE AND THE MORNES.

THE Sheriff stared at her. Was this slip of a girl making fun of him?

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said. "But I don't reckon you understand me. I don't mean the lady of the house. I mean the head of the Morne gang. He's the party I'm looking for."

"I understood you perfectly. You asked for the boss. I am the boss."

"Who is the head of the tribe," persisted the Sheriff in despair.

"I am," said Anemone again. "Won't you come in?"

She held the door open, and the bewildered official found himself hat in hand, meekly prepared to enter.

Just then she wheeled suddenly and saw Fisher standing there.

"You traitor!" she said. "It was you who showed them the way!"

"Sure!" he said, grinning. "I don't see you pulling any revolvers to-day!"

"You may, if you stay here much longer," she

retorted coolly. She turned to the Sheriff. "Mr. Sheriff," she said, "we'll treat you fairly and decently as long as you treat us in the same way, but this man can't stay under a Morne roof, or on Morne ground. Even if I would permit it his life wouldn't be safe for a minute with the men. They would kill him for having brought officers of the law here. The law of the Mornes says that traitors are shot on sight."

Fisher paled a trifle, but he was the sort that blusters. "I reckon there won't be much shooting round here while the Sheriff is on the business," he said.

"We've promised him we'll protect him," asserted the officers.

Anemone smiled scornfully. "You won't be able to," she said. "If my father-in-law sees that creature here he will shoot him as he stands."

"He couldn't see straight enough," said Fisher with an ugly grin.

"Well, I could shoot you myself, of course," said Anemone reflectively, "but I think I'd rather leave it to someone else. If you don't want to have somebody do it you'll get out of this place and go down the trail somewhere where you'll be safe."

Fisher gave her one murderous look. He knew that she was telling the truth. As it was he had just escaped Mat by a chance, if he had known it. Any man who had loved Lancer would have wrung this fellow's neck if he had caught him.

The glance Anemone fixed on Fisher was not men-

acing, but it held a warning as clear as any threat. She turned to the Sheriff.

"He knows I am telling the truth," she said. "If any harm comes to a Morne through him his life will not be safe on Eagle Mountain. It will not be safe in all Virginia. He knows that he would better go,—and go quickly."

Fisher Morne thought of warrants which he knew were in the pocket of the Sheriff, and her words: "If any harm comes to a Morne through him." Like many unintelligent persons, he often did foolhardy things not from courage but from lack of imagination. Arouse his imagination and his pseudo-pluck departed out of him. With a sense of panic he asked himself how he could ever have dared to come to the very nest of the eagles on such an errand. Kill him? Of course they would kill him. And as to the Sheriff's protection, he began to feel how useless it would be. The Mornes didn't allow mere Sheriffs to interfere with what they accounted their business.

He slunk through the rock-gate between the dogs, mounted his horse and went down the trail, slowly at first, but with the increasing speed of nervousness until his descent became a reckless scramble and only the sure-footedness of his mountain pony saved him from going headlong. He kept on going, it may be mentioned, till he was out of the county. Eagle Mountain never saw the Mornes' traitor again.

When he had slipped away between the dogs, Anemone drew a breath of relief.

"Now, will you come in?" she said to the Sheriff. "And will you tell me just what you want?"

"I want," said the Sheriff, coming promptly to the point, "Abner Morne;—on the charge of running an illicit still. And I want to see the still."

"Still?" said Anemone, looking at him blankly. "Are you looking for a still?"

"Yes, ma'am, we are," said the Sheriff with some impatience. "And we propose to find it, too, and put it out of business. You people have been laughing in our faces quite long enough. We're going to clean you up."

"I see," said Anemone imperturbably. "Perhaps you'd like to look for the still now?"

"I would," said the Sheriff, slightly nonplussed by her ready compliance. *Was* she making fun of him after all? The Sheriff, like most fat men, was touchy about ridicule.

Anemone waved her hand in a comprehensive gesture. "Very well," she said, "go ahead."

She walked into the house and began mending the fire as though the matter no longer concerned her. The Sheriff looked about him. It was the queerest, spookiest place he had ever found himself in yet, he told himself. The old woman like a wicked and ancient bird, who was staring at him from the corner,—why, she looked like a witch for fair. Was she the redoubtable Hagar Morne? And the old, old man who sat peering into the fire and hardly seemed to notice him at all,—he was another spooky one. Nice place, take it all in all! As for the girl, what fool had told

him that a very young pretty, timid little creature had gone up into the hills to live with the Mornes? This girl had the air of an old hand. There was nothing of the young and timid little creature about her. Youth and prettiness she did have, but her control of the situation and of herself was the reverse of timid.

"I also," said the Sheriff, "have a warrant for Lancer Morne, for jail-delivery."

Her eyes were suddenly luminous in the dim light of the house.

"It is a warrant that you cannot serve," she said quietly. "Lancer Morne was killed two weeks ago."

The Sheriff remembered that she was speaking of her husband, so he repressed the profound satisfaction which he felt in the intelligence.

"Maybe," he suggested awkwardly, "I'd better go and take a look at that still?"

"Maybe," said Anemone with an inscrutable expression.

At the door they ran into Luke Ellsworth. Anemone grew if anything a shade whiter than before, and looked through him as she went by. The young Deputy Sheriff colored painfully. He could not see why Anemone should treat him like this, even if she had married that savage. Luke Ellsworth had not an unforgiving nature, but he felt that he and life would never be square until he had gotten even with the man who had humiliated him before Anemone. The warrant against Lancer on the charge of jail-delivery was, in fact, a happy thought of his own.

Anemone took the Sheriff to every corner of the place, showing him house, cook-house, lean-to, wood-shed and stable, and exhibiting not the smallest reluctance at any point.

"And what's in here?" said the Sheriff, pointing to the remaining building.

"Hay," said Anemone.

"*Hay!*"

"Yes, fodder for our horses."

She opened the door, and motioned to him to look in. In the obscurity he could see a bee-hive shaped mound of hay, but nothing more. It looked as though the still were not in the Morne pastures after all, but in some even more mysterious and well-hidden place.

They returned to the house in front of which Luke Ellsworth was moodily smoking cigarettes. The men of the posse were scattered about, waiting for something to happen. None of the Morne men were visible. The Sheriff was puzzled. It had all been so easy and peaceful that it worried him. He still felt that the girl was tricking him in some way, but he couldn't quite see how.

Luke Ellsworth went up to Anemone and said pleadingly, "Anemone, what is it you have against me?"

She paused and looked at him for the only time that day.

"A curious affliction of yours," she answered, "which at times makes it impossible for you to lower your hands."

Nobody knew what she meant but Luke. He looked as though she had struck him.

The Sheriff suddenly got impatient. He had to do something, so he said abruptly:

"Well, don't let's hang around here all day. Will the old man come quietly, or will we have to tie him?"

There was a moment's pause. Then Anemone said quietly, "My father-in-law?"

"Sure. Old Abner Morne that broke jail over in Rosvallon."

"He won't come at all," said Anemone.

The next moment she had made a swift signal to Mat, and the next twenty men with revolvers swarmed out of the distillery where they and the still had been hidden under the hastily made hay-cock.

"We don't want to fight," said Anemone, in her clear girlish voice, "but if we have to at least we know how to do it!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE IMPOSSIBLE COMES TRUE.

THE outlaws were perfectly quiet and well-behaved, and they stood entirely and obviously ready for business. The Sheriff had no doubt that he and his men were equal to coping with them, but he was too sensible and successful an officer to want undue violence, and these mountain ruffians were proverbially indifferent to bloodshed on occasion.

"Now look here," he said pacifically to Anemone. "If you're the boss as you say you are, don't you think you'd be wise to advise your fellows not to make trouble? We've come prepared to fight, but like you, we don't want to."

"Will you give up the idea of arresting my father-in-law?" said Anemone. "That's the whole proposition. He's an old man and ill and he doesn't go to jail a second time while there are any of us left to take care of him."

"But it's a matter of law, ma'am," said the Sheriff patiently. "He's been charged with running an illicit distillery."

"By whom?" cut in Anemone.

"Why, ma'am, it's well known! It's practically

admitted that the Mornes have always been in the moonshining business for generations."

"'Well known'! 'Practically admitted'!" repeated Anemone in accents of contempt. "And you call yourself an officer of the law, with no more to go on than that? Where's your proof that Abner Morne ever *saw* a still? Anyway," she finished off calmly, "he doesn't go with you one step, and the less trouble you want to make for your men and mine, the sooner you'll go back the way you came, and tear up your silly warrant!"

Almost without seeming to move, the armed outlaws had drifted close to her and now confronted the Sheriff as they stood grouped in front of the door of Abner Morne's house. The Sheriff was uncomfortable. He was a brave man, but the situation was, in a measure, a difficult one. It was one thing when he had come prepared to arrest the hale father and redoubtable son of the house, but the father was blind and shattered, the son was dead. The only person left to really wage war upon was a slim girl in a black frock who looked at him with fearless eyes and told him his warrant was "silly!"

With an impulse of impatience he rather unceremoniously put his hand on Anemone's arm to push her aside from the door.

There was a roar and a rush from the men who guarded her. It is an epic of the mountain district, the story of that fight. Men who fought on both sides tell of the whirlwind that seemed to break loose when the Sheriff laid his hand on Anemone Morne.

The mountaineers let themselves go, determined to drive the men of the posse from the clearing as a tidal wave bears a fleet of boats. Behind it yet above it on the step of her house stood Anemone, very white but entirely cool and steady. She held a revolver in her hand, ready in case of a rush for the house. There were few shots at first. According to her directions, the men of the Mornes tried to force their enemies out of the enclosure at their muzzle points. But the Sheriff lost his temper fairly and fired point-blank at Mat who stood just in front of his mistress. The man, with a muttered oath, clapped his hand to his shoulder. Then, indeed, pandemonium broke loose, and the echoes of the shots thundered against the crag above the Eyrie. Mat only had one arm left, but he shot merrily away with that. Two of the Sheriff's men were wounded, but no one badly hurt.

Such was the scene that two people came upon as they rode in through the jutting rocks that made the gateway.

They were a man and a woman. The woman was Mrs. Breckenridge and the man was—Lancer Morne!

In a moment Lancer had sprung to Anemone's side and taken the revolver from her. She never forgot the look he gave her. For herself she swayed where she stood and wondered if joy could kill? . . . When she came to herself, and could again open her dizzy, radiant eyes, the shouts and clamor and shots had passed out of the clearing. The outlaws were driving the posse down the trail. Mat, a little shaky

from loss of blood, was shouting cheers and imprecations alternately from the rock portal.

Anemone looked into Lancer's face, and all the questions and the answers of men and women passed between them. Then with a sob she gave him her hands, and there under the open sky he bent and kissed her on the mouth. A storm was slowly coming up; clouds were gathering far down the Gap, and a strong fresh wind was rising,—singing around the Eagle's Eyrie.

Mrs. Breckenridge was on her knees beside her sister inside the house. They had not met for twenty-five years.

Explanations tripped each other up. Sarah had known nothing of her nephew's disappearance and supposed death till she had heard of a young man rescued from a snow-slide by a party of hunters. The news had come quite casually through a doctor who lived half-way between Rosvallon and Eagle Mountain. It seemed that for days Lancer had been delirious from exposure and minor injuries, but things that he had muttered in his fever had pointed to a Mrs. Breckenridge as being a relative; and the doctor, knowing by hearsay of the well-to-do widow of that name who owned a place in Rosvallon, had telephoned to find out if it could be she. Lancer's aunt had set out forthwith, and finding him on his feet again anxious to get back to the home-trail, had yielded to the old secret yearning fermenting within her for so many years, to see her birthplace and her own people once more. It gave her a wild joy to

mount a horse again; and no adventurer exploring a new land of promise and of wonder ever fared forth upon a journey with more poignant excitement than did Mrs. Breckenridge make her way up the well-known, precipitous trails of Eagle Mountain. This was where she had climbed in dreams a thousand times; she breathed the breath of the hills as a newly-liberated prisoner breathes that of freedom.

Anemone hardly knew her dignified cousin. She looked suddenly young and vivid, and the unrest had passed out of her eyes.

"I shall have to go back and be a Southern lady again," she said with resignation. "But this has done me good!" She drew out a pistol with an air of triumph, and showed it to her sister. "Hagar!" she exclaimed. "I was all ready to use that on the Sheriff if I had to.—I, Sarah Breckenridge! What do you think of that?"

Hagar looked at her with a sort of gleam in her eyes.

"I think, Sally," said she, "that you're more Morne than Breckenridge, and that you can't civilize a Morne,—even in twenty-five years!"

When Hagar saw Lancer, she rose from her couch of skins and woolen stuffs, as might rise some cripple, healed suddenly by a miracle.

"My lad!" she said, in a voice that was like the wind itself it was so big and yet so soft. "My son!"

Anemone, through tears that she had not yet been able to shed for her own sorrow or her own joy, seemed in that instant to catch a glimpse of the mouth.

tremendous, secret exultation of maternity; a glory so knit with pain and life itself that no others could share or comprehend it any more than they could share or comprehend death. A strange feeling came into her heart; she envied Hagar for having been given the bearing of Lancer. It was, though she could not know it yet, the awakening of the mother-longing in herself, and the final subtle thrill that made her wholly woman.

Hagar sank back exhausted, but from that moment she began to get well. As Lancer knelt, holding her in his arms, she suddenly turned and pointed to Anemone standing at the door. "Boy," she said with a note that was almost solemn in her deep voice, "*you've a mate there!*"

It was Hagar's highest word of praise.

Out in the clearing fronting the everlasting hills, they stood together alone.

"What was the little song you sang that I loved so,—though I think I teased you about it?" asked Lancer softly. "The one you made up yourself, about an eagle." . . .

In a tone barely above a breath, Anemone sang the words:

"Where shall you find the eagle's mate?
Up in the air so high;
Up in the hills where the thunderbolts wait,
There you shall find the eagle's mate,
Up by the windy sky. . . ."

"You see," he said with his eyes drinking hers, "it came true. I don't know how, nor why,—but it came true. Oh, my dear, when did you learn that—you loved me?"

"When—Mat came home," she said. Her voice failed her. She could not speak of that awakening now. She was still too near the dark places where one looks on Death from just across the way. . . . Then a slow and wonderful color rose in her face.

"Once," she said, looking at him with her heart in her eyes, "you said that you would never—ask for me as your wife, until—I asked it from you. . . . Dear,—do you still want me?"

In the deep silence that followed, their hearts sang with the rising wind. "Oh, my beautiful one!" breathed Lancer, and he adored her with his eyes. "I could kneel here and give thanks among the hills!"

Anemone leaned against her husband, speechless and awed before the miracle that had been worked for her. Her dead had been given back to her; the eagle had returned to his mate.

"It's only the beginning, Wind-Flower," said Lancer, with his hand hard-clasped about her own. "The Eagles have always been hunted, and they always will be. They'll never leave us secure in our Eyrie. But meanwhile—we are free,—we and our mates,—and there's a joy in forever battling with the weaker things of the valley. . . . Are you content, beloved?"

"Hunted or not," said Anemone as the wind blew

her black hair about her face, "it is the life that I want above all others. I would not change it for any destiny in the valley, or in all the valleys of the world. I am an Eagle's mate, now and for all time."

Side by side they stood, and watched the storm come up between the mountains.